Christ on Main Street

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Dr. Norborg's writings have appeared in English, Norwegian, Finnish, Danish, Swedish, French and Japanese.

This book tells the story of the One whom the world crucified, yet can never forget! Ever since that first Easter when He walked out of his tomb alive, He has been the invisible King of human history. So it shall be until the end of time. He is man's destiny, because He is the Lord!

As the reader turns the pages of this new Life of Christ, he will discover that the story is being told as seen from Main Street. Jesus of Nazareth was surrounded by the teeming masses. He spoke to the multitudes. He loved them, pitied them and challenged them. He ate with sinners in order to make them into saints.

Uncounted thousands of people, young and old, have played a direct part in the making of this book. They are the everyday men and women of our present-day Main Streets, who down through the years gave the author their friendship and taught him to discover the Christ of Main Street.

First there were the seafaring men on the New York waterfront — diamonds in the rough—who taught him that the living Lord still walks the waves with help to men in dire need, physical and spiritual. Next, there were the author's philosophy students of all creeds who gathered in his office after classes to discuss their problems. And, then, there were years of unforgettable human contacts in American Intelligence and World Relief: foreign diplomats, displaced persons, GI's, military commanders, volunteer secret agents parachuting behind the enemy lines, wounded soldiers in field hospitals, seamen on convoy duty, airmen who never returned from their missions, Russian prisoners of war . . . These people, all of them, stood before the author's mind as the idea of *Christ On Main Street* grew into the book which now lies in the reader's hands.

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Christ on Main Street

By Dr. C. Sverre Norborg

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To THE READER:

This book needs no long preface. It tells the story of One whom the world crucified, yet can never forget.

Ever since that first Easter dawn when He walked out of His tomb alive, He has been the invisible King of human history. So it shall be until the end of time. He is man's destiny, because He is the Lord!

As the reader turns the pages of this new Life of Christ, he will discover that the story is being told as seen from Main Street. Jesus of Nazareth was surrounded by the teeming masses. He spoke to the multitudes. He loved them, pitied them and challenged them. He ate with sinners in order to make them into saints.

He proclaimed the great, glad news of the Kingdom of God to the men, women and children of Main Street. At last He laid down His life on a lonely cross, which has been, ever since, the tree of Life in a dead world.

The reader should be told that uncounted thousands of people, young and old, have played a direct part in the making of this book. They are the everyday men and women of our present-day Main Streets, who down through the years gave me their friendship and taught me to discover the Christ of Main Street.

First, there were the seamen whom I was privileged to serve as a young seamen's chaplain on the New York waterfront. Those were the black depression years of the early thirties, when men's lives were being tossed about on the tidal waves of fear and frustration. These seafaring men —diamonds in the rough—taught me the presence of the living Lord, who still walks the waves with help to men in dire need, physical and spiritual.

Next, there were my philosophy students, Protestant and Jewish, Catholic and agnostic, who used to gather in my university office after classes for informal conversations about the things which really matter to present-day youth. Invariably our discussions would move away from the philosophers—Plato or Thomas, Kant or Kierkegaard, Pascal or Hegel—to that mysterious Son of Man, who has challenged mankind itself. To many of the students in that university office the all-important question seemed to be this: How do we get the Christ of Main Street back again into the lives of modern men and women?

After these service years among sailors and students there came the hectic and demanding era of World War II with a call to serve in American intelligence and, later, in World relief. Those were years of unforgettable human contacts: Foreign diplomats . . . displaced persons . . . G.I.s . . . military commanders . . . volunteer secret agents parachuting behind the enemy lines . . . underground martyrs . . . bombed-out families . . . wounded soldiers in field hospitals . . . seamen on convoy duty . . . airmen who never returned from their missions . . . Russian prisoners of war . . .

These people, all of them, stood—as it were—before my mind as the idea of *Christ on Main Street* grew into the book which now lies in the reader's hands.

To my wife and sons I am forever indebted for their inspiring love during the enriching years it took to write this book. For in the last analysis all our Main Streets are made up of the homes of living people. May this new life of Christ, therefore, carry to homes everywhere the story of Him who on Main Street always sought to reach the individual person.

—THE AUTHOR

CONTENTS

PRELUDE . . .

Chapter 1 — The Masses - - - - - - - - 11
Chapter 2 — The Stranger - - - - - - - 27
Chapter 3 — Two Movements - - - - - - - 45

SPRINGTIME . . .

Chapter 4 — Truth and Mercy - - - - - - 61
Chapter 5 — Days of Gladness - - - - - - 81
Chapter 6 — God's Finger - - - - - - - - 99

THE NEW PEOPLE . . .

Chapter 7 — The Twelve - - - - - - - - 119
Chapter 8 — New Horizons - - - - - - - 135
Chapter 9 — Days of Decision - - - - - - 161

REJECTED IN GALILEE . . .

Chapter 10 — Crisis In Capernaum - - - - - 181
Chapter 11 — The Struggle Sharpens - - - 199
Chapter 12 — The Cruel Roman - - - - - - 225

THE CHALLENGER . . .

Chapter 13 — Fire Upon the Earth - - - - 249
Chapter 14 — The Light of the World - - 263

WINTER STRIKES . . .

Chapter 15 — Up to Jerusalem - - - - - - 289

CRUSHED ON THE CROSS . . .

Chapter 16 — The King of Truth - - - - - - 317
Chapter 17 — The Fearless One - - - - - - 337
Chapter 18 — The Lamb of God - - - - - - 373

THE THIRD DAY - - - - - - - - - - - - - 387

Prelude

I. The Masses

THE RESTLESS masses were on the move. After four hundred years of divine silence, a prophet had risen in their land.

The religious interest had suddenly flamed into a personal curiosity and a national expectation, driving the people to leave the bazaars, the workshops and the farms on a pilgrimage to the new preacher's camp down by the Jordan.

Where Main Street changed into the ancient caravan route, groups of people were seen moving down from the north on the pilgrim highway, stretching like a ribbon across the plains. Some were riding mules, but most of them were walking on foot. The throng of men and women were almost as great as a Passover crowd, only this was a pilgrimage moving away from Jerusalem on its way east into the wilderness. That's where the new prophet had appeared; his name was on every tongue . . . John the Baptist!

Later in the day, as the pilgrims descended the steep ravines near the river, they halted to let a long camel train pass by. The Arabs eyed them in mute anger, annoyed at this mad crowd of Jews on their way to listen to some fanatic religionist.

While the camel train passed, the pilgrims turned aside and, taking in the view, which most of them saw for the first time, they marvelled at the panorama, from the naked red mountain walls beyond Jericho to the tamarisks and poplars along the Jordan down to the whitish sheet of water called the Dead Sea.

In late afternoon, they reached the wading place surrounded by willows with their heavy branches dripping in the mud-gray water. At a farm near by, a team of oxen was threshing, the chaff thrown high into the sultry air. Along the river, some enterprising youngsters took charge of the mules of the pilgrims. Business was good. Some of the mules had already been here for days; their owners did not seem in a hurry to leave this strange prophet.

The new arrivals waded across the river and followed the crowds moving north along the Jordan into the huge encampment. Arriving at the time of the evening rite of baptism, they witnessed a strange sight of solemn men and women moving down to be immersed by the prophet, standing in the river. A hush of religious expectation lay over the thousands gathered there. There was neither shouts nor singing. The only sounds heard were the ripples of the baptismal water and the birds singing in the evening sky above poplars and willows.

As dusk fell, the new pilgrims seated themselves around the campfires to listen to stories about this strange new prophet, who had come out of the wilderness to change the people and to fire a flame of divine hope in Israel.

Then the evening prayers sounded from the thousands throughout the prophet's camp, ending with the schemas: "Hear, Israel, the Lord, thy God is One."

The next day, the pilgrims heard John preach. He spoke with the robust courage of a fiery conviction, driving his words at the consciences of his rapt listeners. Dominating the whole scene with his stern personality, he made the throngs feel in their innermost hearts that the Lord was again speaking to his chosen people. His face was young but gaunt, darkened by the desert winds and marked by long fasting.

He challenged all who wanted to enter the coming kingdom of the Messiah to repent of their filth and their sins. God was looking for a new people, set aside for the Messiah in the sacred rite of a river baptism. His every sermon was a call for decision. The Kingdom of God was approaching; the time had come for men and women to enroll in the ranks dedicated to do God's bidding, to wait upon the coming of the Lord's Messiah.

The listeners realized that this place of strange preaching had become a battlefield between the official religion and the uncompromising prophetic message of challenge and hope. They told one another that he was a new Elijah.

"You generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee the wrath to come?"

The Baptist hurled his vehement attack at the Pharisees and the Sadducees who had come out of Jerusalem to investigate the lonely and violent prophet.

The silent masses stood in awe, watching the forces at sword's end: the deadly hatred in faces of the Temple leaders and the vast serenity of the young prophet, clad in the rough skins of camels. The boiling emotions of a religious revolution gripped the men and women on the low shores of Jordan. They were stirring with the fever of a New Day as

they watched the Word of God taking a strangle hold upon the shaken keepers of a hoary tradition.

They had come, these men and women, from the main streets of every city and village in the land, to see and to hear for themselves. The words of John the Baptist were shaking them awake out of a deadening national slumber in the shadows of a hated Roman Empire. Their consciences were frightened by the new message, and yet, deep down, they rejoiced in the fact that the Word of God was heard again in the land.

It had been long in coming. The Romans had long since settled down. Pontius Pilate was enjoying a tranquil reign on behalf of his master, Emperor Tiberius. Herod sat as tetrarch in Galilee, Philip in Iturea, Lysanias ruled in Abilene, and everywhere the ancient land was calm under a strict Roman control.

The foreigners ruled with silent efficiency. They had demilitarized the occupied nation from the slopes of Mount Lebanon to the plains of Beersheba and on into the Holy City of Jerusalem itself. The city of David had come under the administrative control of Pontius Pilate, ruling from his heathen palace in Caesarea-by-the-sea.

Life had become a bitter cup. The lamp of freedom was burning low. Yet, in the stillness of the night, the native soul would sing of the glory of the old days, of Abraham, the Father of the nation, of Moses, the Deliverer, and of David, the Royal troubadour, to whom God had promised a descendant who would rule the world.

With each new dawn, however, the songs of the night were drowned out by the fears of the day. The Roman uniforms were everywhere, and they told a story of lost hope. Where

was now the sacred throne of David and the man to rule upon it?

The voices of Main Street were many, but they were empty of meaning and of direction. People milled around; people traded; men and women crowded one another in the narrow quarters of the ancient city. But nothing really mattered.

For several generations already, their young people had kept up a steady stream of flight into alien lands, far away from the sacred soil of Israel and the feasts of the Temple. Their young men and women, with the ambitions of their own little tomorrows, could not be expected to waste their days of opportunity in a fruitless wait for a Great Day which the prophets had seen from afar, deep in the distant future.

Today was today, and this day was the page of destiny in the book of their own little life, upon which they wanted to write a story of personal success. The faraway Day of God had perhaps its own melody, but you could not hear that tune in the shrill noises of Main Street. So their young people left.

Months or years later, reports would come back to their families by traders or Temple pilgrims telling of how the emigrants had settled in strange places in distant pagan lands. Families would gather to hear news of their sons and daughters, living and working abroad. Eager faces would follow the tales of their kin living in throbbing city colonies in Mesopotamia, Pontus, Asia, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Crete, Arabia or Spania.

The travelers from abroad would tell of children born to the emigrant families in the Dispersion, of their work and financial conditions, of death and tragedy and success. There would be reassuring stories of how, each Sabbath, the emi-

grants would gather together in their small synagogues throughout the world to keep alive their religion and their hope.

The listening families would nod with content and approving smiles when hearing that their kinsmen abroad had not forgotten the Law and the prophets, but in their hearts kept wandering down the lonely memory lanes of sacred tradition which bound them together in the mystic fellowship of Israel toward the Day of the Lord.

Coming out of their synagogues in the faraway cities where they had settled, the Jewish worshippers would eye the ever-present Roman soldiers with the knowing gaze of a renewed inner assurance. From the synagogue they carried a divine promise: the Kingdom without end would come, their Messiah would suddenly appear, and every Main Street in every land would be turned into a glorious highway of the freed of the Lord. It would be called the way of Holiness, the wilderness and the solitary place would be glad, the desert would rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Some day it would thus come to pass that even this world-encircling Roman Empire would decline and be broken. In the Day of the Lord, it would come to pass.

But, then, who could tell when that day would dawn?

Far into the night a scholar sat in lonely meditation in his Jerusalem study, pondering the words of the seer of old, which foretold that a last great empire should arise upon the earth, only to be destroyed forever by the Kingdom of God. Could it be that God was now ready to usher in his own Eternal Kingdom . . . or, was the startling news about the prophet from beyond the Jordan only another false alarm?

Nicodemus listened to the winds of the night, sweeping down on an empty Main Street. Tomorrow perhaps he might go down to investigate this baptizing prophet of the wilderness.

* * *

The soft morning breeze of the January day carried the stern and intense words of the new prophet across the huge crowd. The manliness and mystery of his person kept them in a whisperless silence, which none of them had ever experienced before. In their synagogues scarcely a Sabbath service went by without its becoming a heated discussion between scribes at odds on some interpretation. Long and violent arguments far above the understanding of the common people would ensue, as one scribe fought another, each reciting long and obtruse quotations from scholastic masters on the point under debate. Again, when the great feasts took them to the Temple in Jerusalem, the common people saw more than they heard of things religious. The hundreds of thousands of Jerusalemites and pilgrims milling around in the vast temple grounds during the festival time became a mass of excited voices, each man trying to let his neighbor hear how hilariously grateful he was to be among the jubilant people of God. Shouting for joy, they melted into the din of the feast. They were swept away on the waves of a common gladness, which renewed their assurance of belonging to his people, who rules on High. When the day arrived for their departure from the Holy City they rejoiced in the feeling that God had visited his people and given to each of his elect a memory of his glorious presence in Zion. They would bend every effort to be back.

Out here in the stillness of the Jordan valley, between the Dead Sea to the south and the endless wilderness toward the

east, the pilgrims had come face to face with something new. Here there was no debate. There was no wild mass ecstasy to cover them with the warm assurance of being one of God's elect.

John, the new prophet, was making all of them feel as though God was pointing his holy and invisible finger at each of them. There was a frightening feeling of vast loneliness about it, as though the prophet had been given power to make each man neighborless before God, in spite of the thousands who stood in rock silence listening to the message pouring from the mighty preacher.

Soldiers, merchants, herdsmen, tanners, peasants, tax collectors, old fathers, young sons, Galileans, Judeans, and men from afar, their eyes could see them all and yet the prophet's burning words seemed to make all other men disappear, as he cried out: "Repent ye, repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

As the Baptist preached, his eyes filled with aggressive righteousness, the wilderness scene was hushed with the holy presence of the living God. Each listener suddenly realized that his own trivial life was being rent asunder by the piercing sword of the Lord. A still but mighty inner voice told him that this kind of divine challenge was the same as that which had come to Israel in the days of Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah.

"You soldiers, repent, do violence to no man, neither accuse anyone falsely. Be content with your wages!"

"Repent, ye rich, the Day of the Lord is at hand. He who has two coats, let him share them with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

"Repent, you tax collectors, and exact no more than that which is appointed you."

"Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire!"

As the prophet's challenge grew into a devastating climax, the listeners realized that they were in the grip of a religion which attacked their lives with relentless fury. A stolen look at their neighbors in the vast crowd only proved that the next man was going through exactly the same inner struggles. The ax of God was at work.

It came as a deep relief, therefore, to hear the prophet end his piercing preaching with a call to all to confess their sins and be baptized. One could get right with God. The filth could be washed away.

Suddenly there was a storm of personal confessions and prayers for forgiveness from hundreds upon hundreds of men and women who had heard and believed. The Day of the Lord had come with healing for bruised consciences. John the Baptist was more than a prophet; he was the bringer of peace from above.

As the repentant men and women marched ashore after their immersion, the watching crowds saw that their faces were aglow with the pure light of people who had found something everlasting to live for.

Later in the day, an alien disturbance spread through the whole camp. New emissaries from the Temple authorities arrived suddenly and were presently confronting the prophet, demanding an explanation of the unauthorized movement he had started here in the wilderness.

"Who are you?" Their haughty voices were filled with angry contempt.

The gaunt teacher in rough camel skins looked at the Jerusalem emissaries, his face calm with fearless serenity.

"I am not the Christ."

"What then? Are you Elijah?"

"I am not."

"Are you the prophet?"

"No."

The emissaries looked at one another as if to remind themselves of the fact that they had stern orders to bring back with them accurate and full information about this disturbing new messianic movement, reports of which had already reached the ears of the malicious Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

The listening crowd seemed to detect a worried tone almost close to pleading in their voices, as the delegates from the Temple continued to press the Baptist for a clear-cut answer.

"Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

The prophet waited for a moment, a regal calm in his face. At length he answered them, as a glad assurance filled his words, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

Suddenly he raised his voice in a mighty attack, "O generation of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance! Do not fool yourselves by saying, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I warn you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham!"

At these words the emissaries drew their robes about themselves with violent disgust. Their faces froze in anger at the insult upon Abraham, their holy father, and their own loyalty to Abraham's people. Now they knew what to report to their superiors in Jerusalem. Without any further word, they turned their backs upon the prophet and began to move swiftly down to the fording place across the Jordan.

The eyes of the shocked and silent crowd followed them, until they disappeared, as the setting sun made the distant limestone ravines brilliant with reflections of a deepening purple. The crowd, broken up into groups, moved on for the night toward their tents.

Under the willows to the north of the encampment some Galileans had pitched their tents. They were young fishermen out of Bethsaida by the Lake of Galilee, two pair of brothers, Andrew and Simon, James and John. Close to them other men from the same region, older of age, had tented, happy to share their meals with the young disciples who had become determined to follow the teachings of the Baptist.

The serene January evening blew a soft northern wind across the campfire where Andrew and Simon, James and John sat fascinated as they listened to rich stories of the older men.

"I recall the days of the uprising in Sepphoris. My father went off to fight for the liberation of our people of Israel. At first the revolt was quite successful and the whole region was filled with hope and proud expectations. The arrival of the Lord's Anointed to lift the yoke of slavery from the nation was expected. We who were too young to fight were put to work in the supply caravans sustaining our fighting forces.

All of us were filled with the glorious knowledge of being united unto death against heathen oppressors."

"But what a dismal ending. It must have been hard to take."

The old man looked into the campfire, his face tense with memories of a lost cause.

"You have all heard the story of our defeat, but I saw it. My eyes are still full of the murderous sight. I stood on the hill to the east of the city and gazed at the forest of crosses the Romans had erected when they pursued their revenge. There were twenty thousand crosses and on each of them the dead body of one of our valiant men. Twenty thousand crucified. . . ." The old man's voice became warm with heavy emphasis, "and over the crucified patriots an endless black cloud of feasting vultures. We never found my father. Nor was there any trace of his four brothers. This was Sepphoris."

There was a lull before another old man broke the silence. The story of the twenty thousand crosses hung between them and made them feel the mysterious oneness of a nation, which had waded in blood but had always risen in hope. Thus it would be with God's Israel until the Day of the Lord would appear.

"I have grown old in Israel's battles, but I sense that a new day is at hand. Three weeks ago when I was baptized here by the prophet, the Lord let me see the true light. A kingdom is arising among us and God is purifying unto himself a new people."

"The Lord will deliver his Israel," the man from Sepphoris added with firm conviction.

"Amen, amen. And John is the herald of things to come.

I knew his father Zechariah, the priest, of the division of Abijah. We grew up together."

Andrew and the other young Galileans sharpened their attention. For the first time they had met someone who had firsthand information to offer concerning the new prophet.

"Zechariah served as priest in the days of Herod, king of Judea. He was married to Elizabeth, who was one of the daughters of Aaron. They were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. But they had no child . . . Elizabeth was barren."

The faces around the fire were intense with eager listening, as the desert sky filled with myriads of stars.

"One day while Zechariah was burning incense in the Temple of the Lord, there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. Fear fell upon Zechariah as he was told that his prayers had been heard: Elizabeth should bear a son whose name should be John. And strange things were prophesied by the angel about the child. He should be great before the Lord and turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord, our God, and go before Israel in the spirit of Elijah. He would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and make ready for the Lord a prepared people when God would come to visit and redeem Israel. This is the story of John's birth as we heard it told throughout all the hill country of Judea."

Simon almost shouted for joy, "And this is what we see and hear before our eyes. O for the days of deliverance, when Messiah comes."

"The words of the Lord are true," the old man answered as he concluded his report on Zechariah.

"Indeed they are true," the first old man added, "as it is written in the psalms of Solomon, 'How happy are they who shall live in those days to see Israel rejoicing in the assembly of the people.' "

The next day as the people were in expectation and all men mused in their hearts whether John were the Christ or not, John suddenly halted his incisive admonitions. A strange loveliness filled his face, as if he were seeing a vision. Presently he addressed the crowd, his voice warm with mysterious gladness, "I indeed baptize you with water for repentance, but one mightier than I cometh, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable."

The crowd listened in excited rapture. They had sensed how the Baptist was turning with increasing intensity to the preaching of the arrival of a new and greater prophet. He made his words unmistakably clear, so that even pilgrims who had planned to leave decided to tarry a while longer in the hope of being eyewitnesses to the arrival of the Messiah. What a splendor would be his, when he appeared in the fulness of God! That day the desert would bloom! They could not afford to miss the experience of seeing God's Anointed coming to set up his throne forever.

At the words of the Baptist their longing was strained to the breaking point. Truly it would be a world-shaking event to see the Messiah beginning to swing his winnowing fork over the nations and gather Israel, his wheat, into his harvest.

In the fever of their imaginations, the crowd had not noticed that while John had spoken his prophecy, he had

steadily kept his eyes upon a stranger, who was gazing straight at him from the middle of the crowd.

As the Baptist concluded, the stranger made his way through the crowds directly toward the prophet. As the two men met, the wordless fear of a frightening Unknown fell upon John. Before him stood a young man, preparing to be baptized. Erect and manly, his face serene with holy innocence, the stranger demanded baptism at the hand of John.

The two men eyed each other in a moment of consummate decision. Thunderstruck, John felt assured that this was He. Now the Kingdom was here. In a low voice of bottomless awe and humility at his own worthlessness John greeted the stranger.

"I have need to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me?"

"Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness."

John consented.

Thus, Jesus of Nazareth was baptized in the river Jordan. Immediately as he arose from the water, the heavens were suddenly opened, and the Spirit of God was seen descending like a dove and alighting on him; and a voice from heaven was heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Immediately John's whole being was filled with the trembling joy of prophetic assurance. This was indeed the Messiah. This was the exact sign which the Holy Spirit had foretold him.

John turned with the crowds along the banks of the river, as the people made an opening for the Son of God walking away from the baptism of John.

Without turning, the stranger kept walking deeper and

deeper into the wilderness toward the east. He walked with the determination of a man driven by an urgent mission. His firm steps were like those of a soldier marching into a raging, fierce battle.

Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward very hungry.

And when the tempter came to him, he said:

"If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."

But he answered him and said:

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' "

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him:

"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down. For it is written, 'He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.' "

Jesus said unto him,

"It is written again, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' "

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceedingly high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and saith unto him:

"All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

Then saith Jesus unto him:

"Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.' "

Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

2. The Stranger

AFTER SOME forty days, the stranger came back. He walked in from the desert, his face gaunt and solemn. There were new dimensions to his whole person.

He greeted John the Baptist with a sacred smile which spoke of victory and peace. Without a word the two men left the curious crowd and walked away to a secluded place, far beyond the reach of human ears. No man ever knew what they shared there, the forerunner and the Messiah.

When, at long last, John returned to the encampment, he was met by a sea of eager faces. He sensed that the people felt that their very destiny hung upon this moment. Turning, he saw Jesus coming toward him and lifting his arm he cried with victorious assurance:

"Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man which is preferred before me, for he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be made manifest to Israel. I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

And I knew him not; but he that sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you shall see the Spirit descending and remaining, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.' "

"And I have seen and have born record that this is the Son of God!"

The proclamation rolled to the farthest corners of the huge crowd as if the Baptist wanted to let his words reach to the ends of the world.

The next day John the Baptist was standing with Andrew and John, two of his young disciples, as Jesus came walking out of the camp. In a moment of holy significance John repeated his great confession of the day before, adding, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

Moved by the power of this mysterious statement, Andrew and John suddenly found themselves walking away from John the Baptist and following Jesus. They would never be able to tell what had made them take the first step, but after those first few steps there was no turning back.

Suddenly the Master halted and turned to find the two young Galileans walking after him.

"What . . . ?"

"Rabbi, where are you staying?"

"Come and see."

It was about four in the afternoon.

Andrew and John were invited to stay for the rest of that day; in their young eagerness they did not know that the encounter had changed their lives forever.

Beginning from Moses and the prophets, the new Teacher

unfolded before their young, devout minds, the unbroken thread of God's will with his people of Israel. The Almighty had chosen this nation to bring salvation to all the world.

Never before had Andrew and John felt so at ease as in the presence of this new friend. His knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, attested by his exact quotations, made them realize how scattered and dull their own religion was. The teacher's face radiated sacred enthusiasm at being able to explain to his young listeners what God was about to do.

The clarity and the eloquence of his teaching carried with it a strange, unearthly power, which made the two listeners experience a new kind of personal involvement. As they kept looking into the Master's face, they felt that their secrets, their dreams, and their future destinies lay completely open before this man, who only two days before had returned from the desert.

Long before they retired for the night, and without talking to one another, Andrew and John knew in their heart of hearts that this was He who should come. He had constrained them with his kindness.

They had never dreamt that such a freedom could come to any human being.

At early dawn, Andrew hastened to the camp of John to tell his brother Simon of the new Master.

"Simon, Simon, we have found the Messiah!"

"Where?"

"Come and see."

Walking back together, Andrew poured out the exciting news of the new Teacher, with whom he and John had been the

previous afternoon and evening, listening to teachings stranger and deeper than had ever been heard before.

At the top of a hill, Simon stopped and gazed at his brother. He saw a man who was more eager and overjoyed than anyone he had ever seen. Andrew looked squarely into his brother's eyes and said, "It is true. This is the Messiah!"

Like most of the Galilean fishermen, the brothers came of pious stock, so when James and John, a few weeks before, had suggested that they should all go to the Jordan to find out about the new prophet, John the Baptist, they had immediately agreed.

Simon was a leader among the fishermen, good-natured and strong-willed. Being a young man of more than average intelligence, he was respected for his ability and known for his daring. His innate humor and his willingness to be of help to others had gained him friends along the shores of the Lake of Galilee. He had acquired a reputation as a leader and he did not mind that at all. He told himself as much, as his voice rang out with robust abandon, whenever he gave orders to ready the boats for a catch.

As the brothers approached the place where the new Master was staying, Andrew hastened his steps, joyful that his brother was about to meet the Messiah. As they entered, he did not even get time to introduce Simon, before the Master pronounced:

"You are Simon the son of Jona. You shall be called the Rock!"

"The Rock?" Simon looked directly at the prophet, as he silently revolved the name in his dancing mind. The Rock? Of what? Then he glanced at Andrew and John and wondered whether they too had received new names.

The young Galileans stayed all that day.

Soon after dawn, the following day, the four Galileans were walking north along the road leading up the Jordan Valley. They were going home, eager to reach their beloved Galilee with its sea, mountains, fertile fields and its simple, straightforward people. They marched at a fast pace, putting miles behind them, for the noontide sun would soon force them to seek rest until early afternoon. Tomorrow they would be back in Galilee.

Later their group overtook another young man, Philip, a fellow townsman of Andrew and Simon. The Master challenged the wanderer with a compelling greeting, "Follow me!"—and their pilgrim group grew into a total of five.

The following day they entered the heaviest part of their journey, climbing the two thousand feet on the road leading west to Cana. Reaching the summit, they could see, on the left, the vast expanse of the vineyards of Esdraelon, bathed in the afternoon sun.

As they approached the town of Cana, in the vicinity of the village of Nazareth, Philip eagerly rushed into town to find his friend, Nathaniel. He discovered him resting in the shadow of a thick-leaved fig tree.

The enthusiasm of Philip, the new disciple, startled the philosophical Nathaniel. He did not have Philip's natural gift for getting enthusiastic or moving on the spur of the moment. He had always demanded facts and proofs, so Philip packed as much as he could into his opening sentence.

"We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

"Come and see."

Nathaniel, the skeptic, got up from the ground. Pausing for a moment to look at his friend's impatient and joyous face, his quick mind recalled the extravagant rumors that had been floating around the countryside of a great religious revival down in the southland. He would have a look.

As Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him, he greeted him with open and knowing kindness.

"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

"How do you know me?" Nathaniel exploded in a voice of wonder and annoyance. Instinctively, he sensed that this rabbi had laid bare his innermost man. It annoyed him, since he had always enjoyed the self-possession by which he protected the privacy of his own soul.

"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Nathaniel, stunned for a moment, looked directly at the regal Galilean before him, and he heard his own lips confess, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" The next instant he felt himself lifted into a strange, limitless future.

"Nathaniel, because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these."

The young Galileans around the Master looked bewildered.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

The astonished disciples thought of the dream of Jacob, the patriarch, who had dreamt of angels ascending and descending on a heavenly ladder.

Only, this was no dream.

They did not notice that their Master had started walking down the road.

By nightfall they reached Nazareth, where they were told of a wedding scheduled for the following day, Wednesday, in accordance with the Jewish law concerning the ceremony of the *nissuin.*

The noisy bridal procession had started its march through the streets of the little town. As the bridegroom brought his bride from her house to their new home, the hilarious cries echoed in the nocturnal air from the walls of the narrow streets.

Weddings were the greatest moments of shared joy which these poor people knew, so the lamps, the songs and the shouts of the procession gathered the whole town as into one big family. The revelling would go on for days and the common merriment would carry the inhabitants away from the dull dreariness of ordinary life into a world of refreshing joy.

A wedding meant that the cycle of life had made two young people ready for a common destiny. The wedding rites and the blessings would make them one forever, and then life would begin a new cycle. The mystery of procreation was upon them all. The old couples would smile in benign memories. The unmarried would dream dreams of their own future as they marched under the lamps and throbbed with life's own gladness.

Jesus and his disciples were there. In fact, their presence had swelled the crowds, since everyone was eager to get a

glimpse of the new prophet who had just returned to Galilee from a pilgrimage south to John the Baptist. The town had also heard that Mary, the mother of the prophet, was likewise among the invited out-of-town guests.

For days the town was enlivened by the wedding event, morning, noon and night. It was a generous and gay affair, and the steward of the feast was both busy and happy. This was a wedding long to be remembered.

At length, however, the wine failed.

A sense of emergency filled the servants' quarters and spread silently to a few of the intimate friends of the family. Sooner or later the steward would have to be told. His embarrassment would be complete, and the shame upon the family would be long and deep. Witty tongues would be kept busy telling stories of the wedding which began in splendor and ended in failure.

Mary, the kind soul, approached her son in a comparatively quiet corner of the wedding house.

"They have no wine."

He looked into his mother's eyes with the pure passion of love and yet with an inscrutable independence.

"Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come."

Mary stood for a moment in silence before a majestic presence which she had never seen before. Her heart was lost in the memory of the angel of Annunciation when she first had received the heavenly secret of his birth. That visitation had ended with her own lips saying, "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

She turned and walked quietly down to the servants' quar-

ters and told them in a hushed voice, "Whatsoever he says to you, do it."

Jesus remained in silent prayer. Was this God's hour? He recalled the stones in the desert and the encounter with the Devil. The stones had remained stones.

At length the prayer was answered. The guidance was absolute.

In the hall he stopped by the six stone jars placed there according to the law of purification. Each jar held twenty gallons or more.

Presently he told the servants to fill the jars with water. When they were filled to the brim, he commanded the servants:

"Draw out now, and take it to the steward of the feast."

With shocked wonder the servants obeyed, bringing new wine into the wedding hall for the steward to taste.

There was a sudden commotion as the steward called for the bridegroom.

"Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

Ignorant of the facts of the matter, the steward and the bridegroom took a taste and smiled in mutual satisfaction. There was nothing wrong with this wedding. Only later did the truth become publicly known, but by then the Master had already left the town. And before long, the people had all but forgotten the wedding. They were back in the mill of the uneventful routine of their dreary life.

But his disciples, who had been present to witness the servants' work in filling the jars with water, never forgot

that this, the first of his signs, the Master did at Cana in Galilee, manifesting his glory. And they believed in him.

From Cana he went down to Capernaum for a few days, before he made ready for a pilgrimage to the Holy City. The feast of the Passover was approaching.

Accompanied by a few of his disciples, he left the Galilean town an early March morning, joining hundreds of pilgrims passing south to the national feast in the Temple in Jerusalem. From every hamlet and village along the route new groups kept swelling the march, until the ancient pilgrim road became a living, winding ribbon of men, women and children. Approaching Jerusalem they could see other main roads to the west and to the east packed with tens of thousands on the way to the dwelling place of the Lord Most High.

In the southern sky, the Temple arose, floating as it were above the afternoon mist, the majestic colonnades reflecting the glory of a western sun. At the sight the pilgrims stopped for a moment and blessed the name of the Lord.

A group of travellers, who had come from Rome and Crete by the way of Caesarea-by-the-Sea, fell to their knees, tears of joy streaming from their eyes. Years of spiritual loneliness were lifted as a young man began to chant from the Songs of Ascents.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills.
From whence does my help come?

Many voices, old and young, fell in with the answer:

My help comes from the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth.

His shining face turned towards the distant Temple high on the hill, the young cantor continued:

To thee I lift up my eyes,
O thou who art enthroned in the heavens!

The chorus of many voices continued its prayerful confession:

Have mercy upon us, O Lord,
have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.
Too long our soul has been sated
with the scorn of those who are at ease,
the contempt of the proud.

Now the contempt of men was wiped away from their memory by the mercy of the Lord, whose earthly dwelling place greeted them from afar. With light heart and renewed strength, they pressed on towards the Holy City, until the compact masses of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims slowed their pace to a step-by-step walk.

Coming closer to the city, they saw how the whole scene was dominated by the Temple, girded by immense stone walls upwards from the bottom of the valley and crowned by magnificent Greek colonnades.

This was the Temple which, a generation ago, Herod the Great had built. Adjoining the Temple on the north stood the imposing fortress of Antonia, which now housed the Roman garrison. There the vestments of the High Priest were kept under Roman lock and key, and there their High Priest would have to go requesting that the sacred garments be released for the Passover feast of the Lord.

Thus, even in the high moments of their nation's religious life, the people were reminded of the humiliating fact

that they were living under the Roman shadow. In a bitter feeling of religious revolt and hurt national pride the pilgrims milled through the temple courts. One day it would be different. The Lord would descend on the Mount of Zion.

The Master and his disciples were ascending the steps leading to the southern entrance of the Temple, into the Court of the Gentiles. The throng of Passover pilgrims slowed their ascent to a near stand-still. At length they passed through the four huge rows of Corinthian columns in the Royal Porch only to be met by a bedlam of noise as men, oxen and sheep swirled together in the chaos of the court. It was as though a hundred wild market-places had crowded into the holy place. The stench from the animals filled the air. Customers raised their indignant voices in vain protest against the excessive prices asked for the animals for the sacrificial rites. The money-changers were running to and fro exchanging all kinds of foreign currency for Palestinian coin. Animals were taken away to slaughter; new animals arrived. The trade was getting even more violent and brisk, for the Passover feast would begin at sundown. The scene was one of greed, frenzy and animal misery.

Suddenly a young man appeared, a whip of cords in his swinging fist. He overturned the tables of the money-changers, spilling their stacks of coin into the filth and the dung of the court. He began to drive the oxen and the sheep out of the Temple, until the bedlam turned into a rout. His stern face was set in holy indignation, as he told the sellers of pigeons to remove their goods.

"Take these things away; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise."

"What sign have you to show us for doing this?"

The frightening answer fell like lightning.

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

The answer was a crack of the whip from the Master who was breaking up their mad traffic in the temple court. The profiteers gnashed their teeth in anger, but they moved, driving their oxen and sheep before them or carrying away their boxes of pigeons, trying to hang on to their money. What was this new Jeremiah up to?

On the steps leading up to the temple courts of the women, the men and the priests, a solid mass of frightened spectators, had appeared to watch the strange happening. Passover pilgrims, Levites and Priests stood shoulder to shoulder watching the sudden cleansing of the Temple. High over their silent heads, the view of the inner courts stood clear.

This was the first Passover since the Temple had been dedicated, that the whole Temple ground had been made ready for the feast of God.

Deep down in the Court of the Gentiles the spectators saw the unknown young man stand with the whip in his resting hand. He was surrounded by a few other young men. The animals and the merchants had all disappeared. The little group made a lonely picture in the huge empty court.

Before night fell, the stunned priests had brought news of this strange, unauthorized deed to the attention of the Great Sanhedrin, the supreme body of their nation.

A rebel had appeared on the scene.

The rules and regulations of the Great Sanhedrin prohibited any meeting of that austere body of seventy-one

men during feast days. Thus, the astonishing charge of the cleansing of the Temple by the young prophet-reformer could not be acted up officially until after the Passover. The Sanhedrin chamber at the southwest corner of the inner temple court remained locked during the feast.

But the news had spread and the rumors were many. The secret police of the hierarchy was set to work to establish the identity of this unknown newcomer on the national scene.

Nicodemus, who belonged to the third section of the Sanhedrin, consisting of doctors of law and Pharisees, having heard his name, decided to seek an interview with the Galilean in person.

Being a scholar, Nicodemus had only contempt for the loose rumors and wild guesses of the common people discussing the Galilean and his mission. Neither was he satisfied with the biased narrow-mindedness of the priests, who suggested the authorities put an abrupt stop to the dangerous activities of this new John the Baptist. The latest reports had it that the young prophet with the whip had even performed certain miracles among the Passover crowds. His popularity was in ascendance.

Nicodemus' scholarly mind did not like the violent and partisan spirit of the arrogant priests. Neither did he share their fear of losing their public power. A believer in spiritual realities, he had long since realized that the glory of his people lay in the things of the Spirit.

In the still of the night he went to see this Jesus of Nazareth.

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."

The humble honesty of his opening greeting revealed a scholar who made up his own mind on the basis of undisputable facts.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The mystery of the surprising statement overwhelmed Nicodemus, jumbling his logic and emotions. He felt like a man who suddenly finds himself thrown into a new world with a totally alien language. Frightened by his unexpected helplessness, he heard himself ask an incredibly meaningless question.

"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

As he listened to his own inane question, he could have given all his scholarship to call it back. Where was his reasoning power? He cast his look to the floor in shame.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Nicodemus listened in reverent silence. He accepted the logic of this clear-cut distinction between the flesh and the spirit, between the human and the divine. But how does one pass from the human level to the spiritual realm?

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wills, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so it is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus sat quiet in deep thought. His mind kept going back again and again to the personal challenge in the Master's word, "You must be born again." What he had

imagined as a nocturnal mission of fact-finding had, all of a sudden, turned into a searching hour of self-examination. The majestic clarity of the Master's words had removed him from the neutral ground of a scholastic interest in religious problems to the presence of God the Almighty One.

"How can this be?"

"Are you a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"

Nicodemus nodded in humble assent.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our testimony. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?"

Nicodemus was looking directly at the Master, amazed at the absolute authority which permeated his every statement, when the stranger continued:

"No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."

Suddenly Nicodemus knew the secret of it all. He trembled in his innermost soul. It was as if a door had opened to the secret chambers of God. But could it be? Yes, could it be that, across this table, under this oil lamp, he was face to face with the Messiah of the Lord? He paused and stared at the stranger. Then he bowed his head in speechless adoration.

Later the conversation was resumed. Nicodemus was told that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of man must be lifted up, that whoever believed in him may have eternal life.

This was a night of mysteries revealed, the one more inexplicable than the other. As the nocturnal teaching con-

tinued, the scholar lost himself in relaxed listening. He felt at home in this new world which gave to all his learning a true and living meaning. It was only much later, at another Passover, that Nicodemus really grasped the full truth of the sayings he now heard about the Son of man, the serpent in the wilderness and life eternal.

Towards dawn, as Nicodemus slowly walked up the empty street, he could be seen to stop, again and again. He was memorizing the word that had come from the Master at the end of their meeting. The scholar kept repeating the word to his startled heart until he had it—forever:

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

3. Two Movements

As THE Passover was drawing to a close and the huge masses began to disperse, Jesus and his disciples slipped unnoticed out of the Holy City. The cleansing of the Temple became just another incident in the massive drama of the great national feast. Even the priests chose to disregard the young reformer who had performed the unauthorized act in the holy precinct. He was one of the fanatical zealots one had to expect from time to time, and it was hardly an accident that he belonged to the simple and uneducated people of Galilee. What did those rustic souls know about the business of running a huge pageant for hundreds of thousands of pilgrims?

In case of any future re-appearance of this fanatic the secret police, however, took note of his mad statement that he would tear the temple down and rebuild it in three days.

Some time later reports continued to come in that the movement of that other fanatic, John the Baptist, had transferred its operations to Aenon near Salim. Some witty priest made the malicious remark that John the Baptist probably needed more water and had found himself a better spot on the

river. Even so, the Pharisees were annoyed at the continuance of this unauthorized Kingdom movement. Under certain circumstances the fanatics might start a revolt against the alien rulers and jeopardize the peaceful relations between the Temple hierarchy and the rulers of the land. Such an incident would throw the whole countryside into turmoil and have dire political consequences for the Jewish leadership of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. So the priests put spies in John's river camp to keep the Temple authorities informed and give them a chance to inform the alien rulers of any sign of insurrection.

Some weeks later, the spies brought in the disturbing news of a new and similar movement led by one Jesus of Nazareth and his eager disciples. Signs were multiplying to suggest that this new group was gaining on John's followers in popular appeal to the crowds. There was a noticeable shift from John to Jesus, and the latter's disciples had also taken up this idea of baptizing converts. There was no report that their leader baptized anyone. But the facts remained that the priests now would have two movements to watch. Also, there was a great deal of talk in the country of a Messiah and the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

One day the gloom in John's camp burst out in open rebellion. Some of his disciples had become perturbed at seeing flock upon flock fold their tents and disappear in the direction of the preaching place of the new prophet who was called the Son of God. If this trek should continue much longer the day would soon come when the whole great movement of their leader, John, would be but a memory. In the gloom of a deep frustration they went to talk it over with John the Baptist himself.

"Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here he is, baptizing, and all are going to him."

John looked into their faces and read their wounded loyalty, their frustration, and their love. He knew how they felt. He had long known that this moment would have to come. It was in the plan of God, and sadness filled his heart that they had never really grasped the truth of what he had told them again and again, that he himself was but a forerunner and a herald. For a moment he lifted his face to heaven in prayer. Then he spoke with a voice full of humility.

"No one can receive anything except what is given him from Heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him."

In silence the disciples looked at one another and nodded their heads. Yes, that was what they had always heard him say. And now it seemed that the whole thing was over, they thought, as sadness and uncertainty filled their hearts. They were shocked to find the face of their leader aglow with deep joy.

"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice; therefore my joy is now fulfilled. He that cometh from above is above all."

The shattering impact of the Baptist's joyous words blew away all their doubts. Now they knew. They had faithfully followed their leader these many months, but now his mission had come to an end. A few felt cheated, but most of them moved from a self-centered gloom into the radiant joy of fulfillment at the thought of a kingdom that would go on.

With an arm pointing over the hill in the direction of

the camp of Jesus, the Baptist exclaimed, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

In the days and weeks that followed their camp dwindled away. At length only a few disciples remained who had made up their mind to stay with John to be of such help and assistance as he might need.

One day they found themselves at a mortal crisis.

John the Baptist was commanded by the voice of God to take himself before the adulterous Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee and Perea. This kinglet, a vain and immoral man, had recently returned from a visit to Rome. He was known to have gone to see the Emperor Tiberias at the court of Capri and rumor had it that he was bringing the Imperial Majesty such derogatory information about the procurator and the co-rulers as his paid spies had been able to dig up or concoct.

Those of the palace circles who knew the inside story had suggested that more personal reasons had led their master, Herod Antipas, to journey to Rome. He was burning with passion to see his brother's wife, the ambitious and loose Herodias. Reports from Rome indicated that he had succeeded only too well, for the next thing people knew was that Antipas' legal wife had fled to the palace at Petra, seeking the protection of her Arabian father, the king of the Nabateans.

The rumors had been correct. Shortly after his return from Capri, the sly and domineering Antipas had been joined by his concubine Herodias and her daughter Salome.

The court scandal raised a storm throughout the land. The hated king found himself surrounded by people filled with moral indignation which had its roots in the Law and

in national pride. The unscrupulous Herodias laughed and sinned in utter contempt of these ignorant people who had never understood the free ways of the great Roman society. She cursed and continued her extravagant parties.

One day a prophet from the wilderness was ushered in before the king. He had a message from the Lord to the king.

With intense fire John flung the divine warning at Antipas, that it was unlawful before God for him to have this concubine in his palace. The words of prophetic condemnation echoed through the marble halls and carried out to the great crowd of indignant people who had marched on the palace behind the man of God. The hush of a historic moment fell over the scene and filled the guilty king with a sense of doom. He ordered John the Baptist arrested.

Later he sent him under heavy guard to the fortress Machaerus, a stronghold on a hill in the southern plains of Moab near the Dead Sea.

The outraged Herodias was wild with anger. She would not forget.

When the news of the dramatic arrest of John was brought by hurried messengers to Jesus, he understood that his time had come to move away from the treacherous region of Judea. Avoiding the Jordan Valley, he led his disciples back to Galilee along the hill road running from Bethel across Samaria.

As they passed the border between Judea and Samaria, Jesus sensed that his companions felt ill at ease. They seemed to stiffen in the grip of the mutual hatred which had existed for centuries between the Jews and the Samaritans. But none of them had stopped him to ask why he was taking them through this hostile land with a people of mixed breed

and with an impure religion, centered in the false worship at Mt. Gerizim.

Jesus had not explained why he was crossing through Samaria instead of leading them to Galilee along the Jordan or along the coastal route. Even so he knew that his Galilean companions were silently counting the hours, until they could get out of this cursed land and could again breathe the free air of their own Galilee. As far as they were concerned neither the Samaritans nor the haughty Judeans could hold a candle to the men and women of Galilee.

They walked on in silence, as they entered the narrow valley leading to the foot of Mount Gerizim. The noon-day heat was stifling and his followers were deeply relieved when he called a halt near the little town of Sychar. They rested in the cool shadow of an old tree at Jacob's well and Jesus, wearied with the journey, sat down close to the well. His companions looked with thirsty eyes into the deep darkness of the well. It must be a hundred feet down to the cool water and they had nothing with which to draw. That's just like Samaria, they sighed.

After a while, Jesus asked them to go and buy provisions in the town. Here? From Samaritans? They stared at him with unbelief and hesitation. They would rather go hungry till they reached Galilee. But since he did not answer the questions on their faces, they rose and went—all of them.

No sooner had they got out of ear-shot than they burst into a lively conversation. Questions and speculative answers flew between them as they marched down the sun-drenched, dusty country road toward the town a couple of miles away. Walking in a compact group, the Galileans were ready for anything these Samaritans might do.

"I can't understand what we are doing in Samaria."

"Perhaps he wants to hurry home to Galilee to begin preaching to our own people."

"Yes, but even so it would not have been much longer, if we had taken the Jordan road. Then at least we would have been spared the humiliation of going through this pagan country."

"Won't it be good to cross into Galilee again! It's been a long time."

"What do you suppose his plans are when we reach Galilee?"

"Nobody can tell, but I am sure he will get a greater following among our own people than he had in Jerusalem or in Judea."

At this point they passed a Samaritan woman walking on the other side of the road. Carrying a jug on her head, she was on the way to draw water from the well. As they passed they fell silent and averted their heads.

"Why do you think he passed up that great chance in Jerusalem, when he had cleansed the Court of the Gentiles? You saw how frightened they were, and he had the whip in his hand."

"You are right. Why, he could have whipped the whole Passover crowd into an army of the Lord. That would have been something to witness. But, I guess, he is biding his time."

"Perhaps that's the reason he is in such a hurry to get back to Galilee. Our people are much more faithful and trustworthy. They will flock to him as one man. When this Joshua has his army ready, Romans beware!"

"No; wait—wait a little now."

They slackened their steps for a moment as the calm

voice of John, the young disciple, broke their discussion.

"I was with him the night Nicodemus sat talking with him, or rather, when he talked with Nicodemus. I am not at all sure that he wants to build an army and all that. He told Nicodemus that the only ones who can see the Kingdom of Heaven are those who are born from above, by the Spirit."

"Yes, we all know that, but even so Moses and the prophets all agree that the Messiah shall rule the world. And how can he rule the world and destroy the Roman Empire if he does not use the secret powers of the Lord, which we saw him use when he healed the sick? Don't you think that those signs were only the warning signals of days to come?"

"I don't think so. All the things he said to Nicodemus were of the Spirit. There was a deep mystery in much of what he said. I did not understand it all. Neither did Nicodemus, so far as I could see. He said some strange and beautiful words about Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness to heal the stricken people. In the same manner the Son of man must be lifted up, he said. I don't understand what he meant, but I am sure you are wrong, if you think he is going to raise an army. He is not a Messiah of that kind."

"You think he will be arrested as John the Baptist was?"

"I don't know," John answered and fell silent.

"That was surely true courage the Baptist showed when he went before the wicked king."

"The Baptist is like the old-time prophets. God gives his men courage," John commented.

"But why does not God protect them from evil men?"

"You are a Galilean and do not know the Scriptures?"

"I know," came the meek answer, "but this country in these wicked days needs a few men like John the Baptist. What do you think will happen to him?"

"Herod Antipas will probably round up his followers and crucify them outside the walls of Machaerus just as Varus did with the Galileans before the walls of Sephoris. People are still talking about the rotting corpses on the crosses and the flocks of vultures they gathered."

"And what do you think may happen to us?"

"We do not know."

They had reached the town and went in to buy bread and olives.

At Jacob's well the woman with the jug had arrived to draw water. When she saw a Jewish man, clad in white, sitting close to the well, she slackened her pace and proceeded with caution.

She knew men and she had imbibed the age-old Samaritan contempt for the Jews. This one probably belonged to the men she had met down the road who had turned their faces when they passed her.

As she approached the well, the stranger suddenly spoke to her.

"Give me to drink."

She shuddered at being talked to by a man whom she had never seen before. For a moment she thought of running back to town. Then she braced herself and answered with a sharp voice filled with fear and angry self-defense.

"How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria?"

He felt the wall between them, cold with the hatred of generations, but continued in a friendly, calm voice.

"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, 'Give me to drink,' thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

She moved closer, her fear gone. Whoever this strange man may be, he is harmless—yet, how can he give anyone water, sitting there empty-handed. Did he realize what well this was?

"Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; from whence hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his children, and his cattle?"

She spoke with the self-assuring pride of a small-town citizen telling a tourist of the famous traditions of their town's landmark. Her listener did not seem to notice her words.

"Every one who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will be in him a well of water springing into everlasting life."

The woman looked at the water jug standing at her feet and exclaimed with enthusiastic relief, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

"Go, call thy husband, and come back here."

In an instant her relief turned into a shock of hurt consternation. She felt a heavy guilt flood her whole being, as she stuttered, "I have no husband."

The answer came immediately.

"Thou hast rightly said, 'I have no husband;' for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband; in that saidst thou truly."

The summer heat stood sultry between them, but she froze with a frightening chill.

"Sir, I perceive that thou are a prophet."

Her eyes wandered from the well to the tall peak of

Mount Gerizim hovering above them. Would the mountain could swallow her up! Then she hastily tried to cover herself by asking a great question that seems to have been suggested by the mountain itself. She talked with the nervous speed of an embarrassed person.

"Our fathers worshipped on this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship, for salvation is from the Jews."

She did not know what to believe. As a Jew he was sticking up for his own ways of worship, but then, again, he was talking about a kind of worship in the future when neither Mt. Gerizim nor Jerusalem would count. Her face reflected her confusion.

"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth."

As he spoke, his calm words dispelled her confusion. Now she understood that he was speaking of the latter days of the Messiah, a hope her people shared with his. A smile of assurance filled her face, even though she realized how ignorant she was in such matters. Her life had been of the flesh.

"I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will tell us all things."

Jesus arose, and looking straight at her he answered.

"I, who speak to thee, am he."

Just then his disciples returned. As the Samaritan woman

brushed by them, they turned to their Master, their faces inscrutable with questions they did not dare to ask. A rabbi never spoke to a woman in public, not even to his own wife.

Little did they realize that he had just confided to this half-pagan woman of bad repute the holiest secret of all. Neither did they understand that this day the Kingdom of Heaven had broken through the geographical barriers that men insist on building around the things of the spirit.

The disciples hurried with the simple meal.

"Master, eat."

He did not seem to hear their eager invitation. His face was lifted to heaven in deep peace. Finally he spoke.

"I have food to eat that ye know not of."

Had anyone brought him food? The disciples looked from him to the food they had just brought, when his words continued.

"My food is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

He lifted his arm and pointed to the lush green fields around the well, and said, "Do you not say, there are yet four months, and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields—they are already white to harvest."

They all sat in silence, the food untouched.

In the town of Sychar people were already filling the main street. A woman, whom they all knew, went calling down the street the incredible news of a Messiah resting by the town well. Like a town crier, she carried her startling news from house to house for all to hear.

"Come, see a man, who told me all things that I ever did. Is not this the Christ?"

The next moment the road to the well was filled with people, running, sweating, rushing one another. The dust in the air showed their eagerness.

The two days that followed they remembered as long as they lived. The Jewish Messiah, the Son of God, had taken his disciples with him into their village and accepted their invitation. For two days they listened to him teach. He was a prophet and many of them believed in him. They forgot their fields as they thronged around him to hear him speak of a Kingdom of Heaven for all men with God's peace among the nations of the earth.

When he left their village to go home to his Galilee, they all followed him out to the crossroad by Jacob's well. The happiest of them all was the woman who had met him first, for when the strange travellers disappeared in the valley, her own townspeople turned to her, whom they had despised for years, and said, "Now we believe—not because of your words, for we have heard him ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

Then they slowly turned and went back to their village. To their happy eyes even the streets and little cottages looked different.

Springtime

4. Truth and Mercy

In the stillness of dawn Jesus and his companions crossed the border between Samaria and Galilee. The May morning stood bright over a landscape of exquisite beauty. The fields of deep green and the inviting rolling hills stretched north, framed by Mount Hermon and Mount Carmel barely visible in the morning mist. It was a smiling view. Now they were home.

The young Galileans paused for a moment before they continued on their way, passing through many of the small villages dotting the region. Their energetic countrymen could be seen at work in field and in village. The disciples felt proud that they belonged here among the true and simple people of the Jewish faith. This was their Galilee, so different from the hard and cynical Judea with its Jerusalem, where the leaders seemed to have come to a shameful agreement with the occupying Roman power. There they had felt captive and ill at ease. Here in their own land they walked among a people that had kept their faith intact and their spirit of freedom alive. They greeted each person they passed on the

road with a cheerful "Peace" and received an equally cheerful and friendly answer of "Peace."

Later in the day their little group separated, as Peter, John and Andrew turned off to the right to go north to their homes and their boats at Bethsaida by Capernaum. The Master bade them a fond farewell, as he and Nathaniel prepared to continue westward to Cana and Nazareth. He assured the departing companions they would all meet again, but he was noncommittal as to time or place.

As the two travelers approached Cana, Jesus parted from Nathaniel and proceeded to the little village of Nazareth, alone.

A few days later, he reappeared in Cana and went directly to Nathaniel's house, which was soon filled and surrounded by people who had heard he was in town again. Many of them had been guests at the great wedding some months before, and since they had heard the tremendous story about his daring cleansing of the Temple during the Passover, they were proud that he had come to revisit their town.

The narrow street was packed with eager and curious people, as he suddenly appeared at Nathaniel's door. An immediate silence gripped the crowd as he cried out for all to hear.

"The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

Just as they were wondering what these words meant, there was a sudden commotion down the street. Turning, they discovered that a Roman soldier was halting his horse at the rim of the crowd. Those close by saw that the horse was wet

with perspiration after a forced ride. Had he come to arrest the prophet of Nazareth? Or perhaps to warn him?

As the rider quickly dismounted, the crowd immediately began to press against the walls to make way for him in the middle of the narrow street. As he rushed by up the street they saw that he was a Jew, dressed in the uniform of a Roman centurion. Some thought that they recognized him as one of the officials of the hated Antipas, stationed in the garrison in Capernaum. When he had passed, the crowd flowed together again and pressed toward Nathaniel's house and the prophet. Agitated excitement dominated the strange scene. It was one hour past noon.

There was no arrest. The soldier approached Jesus, and threw himself before the Master.

"Sir, my son is at the point of death. We live in Capernaum. Will you not come down and heal him? I beg you. He is dying. Come, I beg you."

The Master looked, silently and long, at the raised face of the eager, pleading centurion from Capernaum. The face of the Nazarene filled with warm compassion.

As he lifted his eyes and saw the crowd agog with the ecstasy of an evil miracle-madness, he looked at them with stern disapproval.

"Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe!"

He knew that to them the sign at the wedding had signified nothing. He feared that a second sign would make no difference either. Their faces hardened in hurt pride.

"Sir, come down before my child dies."

Jesus asked the soldier to rise, and the two men faced each other completely oblivious of the crowding spectators.

"Go; your son will live."

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way.

As the crowd began to drift, Jesus the Master walked silently back through the door.

Leaving Cana, the centurion let his horse canter along the dusty country road. At the nearest inn he would water the animal and stable it for the night. An inner assurance told him that there was no longer any cause for alarm. The joyousness of faith flooded his heart at the thought of the Master. His son would live.

The next day, as he was riding toward Capernaum, he was grateful that Peter and the other disciples had told him that their rabbi was either at Nazareth or staying with Nathaniel in Cana. Soon he came in sight of the stirring beauty of the Sea of Galilee far below.

Suddenly two of his servants appeared in the road and came running toward him. "Your son is alive," they shouted with joy, as he stopped the horse.

"When did it happen?"

"Yesterday, one hour after noon, the fever left him."

The seventh hour of the day—that was the hour, yes, that was the exact hour, the centurion told his glad heart.

When he reached his home, he told the people gathered there every detail of his journey; and he himself believed and all his household.

A few days later the lonely Galilean sat resting on a stone by the Lake of Galilee. He had left Cana at daybreak.

This was a journey directed with clear and full intent. He would make Capernaum, down below, his home and mission headquarters. His own intimate knowledge of Galilee and the clear guidance of the Spirit had assured him that this was the time and the place.

With the calm composure of a mind that has set itself to a life task he drank in the magnificent, exhilarating view of the lake region, which from now on would become his basis of operations. Along the shore he saw the towns of Capernaum, Chorazin and Magdala. Over on the bleak and naked east coast of the lake, lay the little town of Gamala, nestling on the copper-colored shore.

Along the western shores fishing villages dotted the spaces between the towns, all the way south to the white city of Antipas' Tiberias. The town was new, but it was Roman and pagan in spirit. No true Jew ever entered it, because it had been built on the site of a cemetery and was considered unclean. On the lake, in front of Tiberias, Roman skiffs rode at anchor. Even Galilee was occupied by alien forces.

The Master turned his eyes from the alien Tiberias to gaze at the clear blue waters of the Lake of Galilee, kept fresh by the streams of Lebanon. The lake lay as a great blue heart in a landscape of an incredible verdure. Down the hill he could see the vegetation which made proud Galileans call their land a paradise of the Almighty: palms and fig trees, vineyards and olive-orchards, citrus gardens and walnut groves flourishing everywhere in the northern breeze.

At length, he rose and continued down the steep decline to Capernaum. At a turn in the road, he passed a long mule train carrying barrels of cured fish from the preserves in Tarichae to the sea ports on the Phoenician coast. Farther

down, at the crossroad to Tiberias, his eyes caught the pitiful sight of a group of sick men and women making their slow way to the hot mineral baths close to Tiberias.

The old road to Capernaum, cut through hills of volcanic basalt, had seen centuries of traffic and had witnessed the shifting destinies of countless generations.

This day a lonely wanderer from Nazareth walked with young steps and manly determination along the road to meet his new home-town, Capernaum.

On the top of the last hill of the zig-zagging road he had a full view of the city by the shore of Lake Galilee. Rows of simple houses, built of black basalt, ran along the shore. It was a picture of dull monotony broken only by the Synagogue, which shone with its white limestone in the setting sun. The religious center of the town, it was the pride of its twenty thousand citizens. Its Corinthian columns were out of character and some of the orthodox people had raised objections when the edifice was being built. They had protested in vain, since the majority had thought the columns would add beauty to the austere building, which had become the proud pet project of all the town's people. Even Roman soldiers and Greek traders had participated in the work of bringing in the white limestone from the quarries. But only men of their own faith had been permitted to do construction work on the house of God.

Walking down Main Street, the man from Nazareth passed the noisy throng at the customs house, a hated place where traders cried that they were being robbed and where grumbling citizens came to pay the cursed tax. The place before the customs house teemed with the children of the poor begging for bread and being pushed aside.

A few steps beyond, the Nazarene was recognized by a youth who had seen him at the Passover in Jerusalem. As the traveller asked for directions to Peter's house, the young man offered to guide him. They walked on together. Nobody noticed them since both were dressed in the garb of the common people and spoke the Galilean dialect. At a corner they turned into a narrow street which led to the fishing wharfs and the humble dwellings along the shore.

In the next few days the teeming city was astir with vague but exciting rumors. The great prophet had arrived. Things were about to happen. A rumor had it that he intended to make their city his home. If the things Peter and the other fishermen had told them were true, he would certainly find a hearty welcome from all the citizens. Their imagination had already begun to fill their buzzing conversation with pictures of the golden days they might expect, when the prophet would begin his miraculous work. Only a few days previously, a centurion had startled them by telling an incredible story of how his dying son in Capernaum had been healed just by a word the prophet had spoken in Cana. And, best of all, the centurion's servants, their own kinsmen, had assured them that the story was absolutely true.

One morning as the prophet walked along the shore a growing crowd of men, women and children were trailing him. From the wharfs, the fish-curing shops, the alleys leading into the city, more and more people came running to join the people following the stranger. The word spread throughout the city with the incredible speed with which exciting rumors travel from corner to corner, from street to street.

Near some fishing boats at the beach, the man from Nazareth stopped and turned to discover that the whole town

was following him. In the twinkling of an eye thousands had surrounded him on every side, forcing him to the water's edge.

As they continued to press upon him, he saw two boats by the lake and the fishermen standing with their nets in their rough hands. They had just been preparing to wash their nets, when this milling and agitated mass of people had appeared.

The Master got into Simon's boat and asked his fisherman-friend to put out a little from the land. Sitting in the boat, he began to teach the people.

His clear young voice reached them as they packed the sandy beach. They were his people, Galileans, and they were the common folks to whom he had been sent: fishermen, tanners, boat-builders, dyers, shop-keepers, peasants, soldiers, winedressers, laborers, women, youth, and many, many children.

He called his message the glad tidings. And he told them, as a friend would tell a friend, the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven, where God is King and where love and justice reign. The time was at hand, the Kingdom was here. God was calling them to a new life and a new joy.

They followed his every word with eager delight. If this man were the leader of their synagogue, they would certainly get a religion that would lift and enrich their lives. He did not speak like a religious professional. He spoke in terms and illustrations which they understood, and often during his sermon they would nod and smile to their neighbors in the crowd, which suddenly had been changed into a kind of mysterious fellowship, dominated by the glad tidings from the lips of the prophet in the boat.

Simon sat up in the front of the boat, lost in listening and remembering. This was the same kind of gladness as they had witnessed in Sychar during the two days their Master spoke there. In fact, here was an even greater crowd than any he had seen around John the Baptist along the Jordan. Also, this message was a glad one, different from the fiery, almost threatening preaching of John. The Master spoke too of repentance and of the Law, but there was a new note of kindliness and love in everything he said. He made things so clear by telling his listeners of the lilies, the birds of heaven, the mustard-seed put in the ground, all things they knew from their homes, family life and workshops.

Simon listened as in a dream. The boat was gone, the crowd had disappeared, so had the breakfast table and the empty nets of the night. He was in another world, wide awake.

Suddenly the world came back: the lake, the boat, the Master and the crowds on the shore, the skies and the fishing village. What had happened?

The Master had finished his teaching. He beckoned to Simon to put him ashore again. Simon found the oars. Could it really be over? Was he leaving them . . . could he ever leave them?

As they hit the sand, Jesus turned to Simon.

"Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch."

The startling challenge had been heard by the crowd. Simon hesitated for a moment as a stream of confusing thoughts rushed through his mind. Nets, a catch at daylight, the crowd and this command?

The big fisherman rose in the boat, the oars in his hand. A broad smile spread over his face.

"Master, we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing. Nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the nets."

Calling his brother Andrew aboard, he turned his boat out toward the deep. Simon felt relieved. He had obeyed. His decision to act on the Master's word had been made in spite of the people's sneer and against his own judgment gained by experience. Yet, he did not feel like a fool. It was more like a confident stretching of his common sense. If the Kingdom of God called for reckless courage and abandon, then this was really a reasonable fishing trip.

They let down the nets and enclosed a great shoal of fish. Simon turned and looked at the Master, watching them from ashore. His word had been true!

Then the brothers called to James and John, the sons of Zebedee, for help with the breaking nets.

The two boats, filled to the rim, moved slowly toward shore. The jubilant crowd was buzzing with amazed comments at the catch.

Suddenly their enthusiasm froze to a silence of hushed awe, as a pale and shaken Simon, making his way ashore, fell down at Jesus' feet saying: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

His strange and terse confession was uttered in a deep voice of fear and trembling.

"Simon, fear not; from henceforth you will be catching men."

The Master gave Simon his hand and as the fisherman arose, Jesus took him over to the other boat, where he called the brothers James and John, who left their father Zebedee in the boat with their hired crew, and followed him.

Neither the crowd nor the new fishers of men realized

at that moment that this was exactly the mission which the Master had thought of this very morning as he walked down to meet his friends coming in after a night at sea. He was now ready to begin his life's work and he required willing and trustworthy helpers. He had been watching these Galilean fishermen during the months they had shared together in Judea.

He knew them. They were fit for the kingdom road. And he needed them more than they would ever realize.

The next day was the Sabbath. From the moment the doors opened the ruler of the synagogue understood that this day the devout would be accompanied by many of their townspeople who rarely attended the weekly services. It was obvious that the people came because they expected the Rabbi of Nazareth to be there for the morning service.

The semi-dark interior of the house of God filled quickly to capacity. When the new prophet and miracle performer arrived, he and his companions were led to reserved seats at the front near the dais.

The service proceeded according to the age-old ritual: readings of the Holy Book of Israel, the Law and the Prophets, prayers and melancholy chanting. As the morning advanced into forenoon, a certain restlessness seemed to invade the sacred room.

Toward the end of the service, the ruler asked the Nazarene to address the congregation. The young prophet arose and, walking solemnly to the dais, he asked for a scroll, opened it slowly and read in a firm and clear voice the holy text assigned for the day. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon him.

Then he sat down and began to teach them.

"Think not that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets! I have come not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, not one tittle, shall pass from the law, until all be accomplished."

With a rush of eagerness they all nodded their heads in unanimous approval. A murmur of satisfied whispers went through the audience. He stood for the law. He shared their faith.

"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Peter and John could notice from the approving faces of the councilmen that their Master's words were pleasing, indeed, to the strictest observers of the law. They sensed that the Master would win the hearts of their fellow-citizens and they were happily waiting for his next words, which came with the same vigorous, unsentimental emphasis:

"For I say unto you, that except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven."

The words, spoken with calm and stern emphasis, stunned the audience, creating a commotion from the dais down to the doorway. The loud murmur was instant and many-voiced. The listeners' faces changed expressions as some nodded their heads while others glared at the speaker in obvious irritation. Hate clouded some faces up at the front. The synagogue was not a place for such criticism.

The Nazarene continued in an undisturbed voice:

"Ye have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever kills shall be in danger of the judgment.' "

The audience recognized the saying and quieted down.

"But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

There were no nodding heads. An uncomfortable silence met the words of the prophet, as if each man were searching his own conscience. This was a new kind of preaching. Never before had they been spoken to like that in this sacred place.

"Ye have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' "

Most of the audience bowed their heads, as if they were afraid of the interpretation the new teacher was about to make of this uncomfortably personal commandment.

"But I say unto you, that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye offend you, pluck it out, and cast it from you; it is better for you that one of your members should perish than that your whole body be cast into hell."

"And if your right hand offend you, cut it off, and cast it from you, for it is better for you that one of your members perish than that your whole body should be cast into hell."

There was no visible reaction at all to this stunning statement from the Master. It was as if the audience had disappeared, leaving each man helplessly alone with the one who spoke. Each man felt as if his own untidy life were under divine scrutiny.

Suddenly the air was rent by a hideous cry. A man with an unclean spirit shrieked at the Master, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

Panic filled the synagogue as the raving man rushed forward to the dais. No one dared to intervene, as the Master calmly arose. Then, a fearless command rang through the synagogue.

"Be silent, and come out of him!"

Immediately the victim of the unclean spirit flung himself to the floor, rolling about in hideous convulsions. Then he lay quiet. The next moment, he rose, healed.

The people suddenly found themselves standing in speechless awe at the sight. They had been witness to a duel they would never forget. Their credulous eyes stared at the speaker with the healed man standing quietly beside him.

Stunned and amazed, the worshippers found themselves asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

As the Master and his companions left the house of God, the silent men outside respectfully made a path for the Nazarene, who passed them in deep meditation. He was disturbed and frightened of soul. No one realized that once again he had been face to face with the Evil One, whom he had fought off in the wilderness. Today, the Tempter had entered the place of God and, making a sick, mortal man his instrument of derision, had screamed out the Messiah secret for all to hear. That was not in God's plan.

The Prince of the World was out to destroy the Kingdom of God by delivering the masses to the Master on the devil's

terms. He shuddered as he walked through the crowd toward Peter's home.

When the people had returned to their homes after the synagogue service the strict Sabbath calm settled over the whole town. The streets were empty but for some Greeks, Arabs and Phoenicians who did not belong to the chosen people. Here and there a few non-practicing Jews strolled through the cool narrow streets under the disapproving eyes of the faithful, who kept indoors on the Lord's Sabbath, according to the tradition of their elders.

In a thousand homes the afternoon was spent in lively and disturbed discussions about the new prophet and his strange powers of word and of healing. They had never seen anything like this. And their confused minds made guessing stabs at the meaning of it all.

"He is a man of God, for no one can do these things unless God is with him."

"Certainly, and he stands for the law and the prophets just as much as any of the Pharisees."

"But, if so, why did he attack the Pharisees, who are our best people and who try their best to keep our people from the idols of the Romans and the falsehoods of the Hellenes? If it had not been for the clear-headedness of the Pharisees, we would long since have been lost as a nation."

"I agree, and I earnestly hope that this Nazarene and the Pharisees can get together and join forces. The way he preaches, he would rally all true Jews behind the Law of Moses. That would be a truly great day for our people. Remember, we are three hundred thousand strong right here in Galilee."

"Then, you think this young prophet is the Messiah?"

"I am not so sure, but he has the power of the old prophets and he would certainly set our rulers in Jerusalem straight."

"Oh, that crowd of collaborators you had better forget. They are led by the cursed Sadducees and those traitors think only of how to keep their own power and wealth by appeasing the cursed Romans. I hate them."

"Son, hate is an evil word. I have grown old, waiting for the Hope of Israel. I have seen many things happen to my beloved people. What happened this day in our synagogue made my heart glad, as the psalmist said. Today I saw a new sign of God's mercy to his people. The sun is rising with healing under his wings. As the Nazarene spoke, I knew that the Day of the Lord must soon be drawing near for the salvation of our people. I may be too old to see it happen, but one day this Elijah will be followed by the Great One himself. Mark my words."

"My father, may it be so. And may the God of Israel give you days to see it fulfilled."

In the home of the synagogue ruler some scribes of the party of the Pharisees spent the afternoon in eager and technical discussions. For some reason they were more confused than the ignorant people who did not really know the scriptures and the tradition of the elders.

"I don't get it! First, he begins by praising the Law, telling us that not one iota will be destroyed, and then he proceeds to destroy both the Law and the devout men who are the guardians of the Law. If he were a prophet, he should know better."

"I think he is out to destroy us all. If his wild ideas should

ever take hold of our people, the Romans would conquer not only our land but our religion and our souls. Palestine would become just another Greece or Egypt. I have lived in both places in my young days, so I know. I saw how those nations had become nothing but helpless Roman provinces in the cursed Empire. They had no resistance party, because they had nothing to defend."

"Well spoken, Simon! Personally I witnessed the same thing in Syria. In fact, that was exactly the reason why I brought my family back home again to Galilee. I thank God that I am a Pharisee, and I am willing to give my life for God and our people. The Roman devils may stay here for a long time to come, but they will never be able to change us or our children into Romans and pagans. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

"Trouble has been the destiny of Israel ever since Egypt and Moses, the Deliverer. Sometimes I lie awake into the third and the fourth watch pondering and praying, how long, O Lord, how long?"

The others nodded their heads in solemn agreement, nourished by the memories of their own wakeful nights for their beloved Israel.

"And this is where I cannot follow this new teacher from Nazareth. By attacking the Pharisees in front of all the ignorant folks he is breaking down the only defense our people have against the false gods and the false ideas of the pagans. For years we have built a fence around the Law and a fence around our people. The generations to come will rise up and call us blessed. They will say that the Pharisees saved our nation in the night of the Romans."

"Blessed be the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob! The Holy One of Israel will see his people through these black years, but only if we keep our resistance strong in the power of the Lord."

"That is exactly why I did not like the way this Nazarene kept saying, 'But, I tell you . . .' as if he had some divine authority as high or higher than the Law of Moses. There was no humility in his words, and a proud man is always a dangerous man."

Their theological conversation was suddenly disturbed by the noise of excited voices and moving feet outside the door. A young scribe opened the door to investigate the commotion.

"The street is full of people, and they are carrying their sick."

"I told you! Listen to them! They are miracle-mad."

"He is disturbing the Sabbath peace."

"Come now, it is sundown, and the Sabbath is legally ended."

"Listen to them. They are all talking about him."

The scribes and the Pharisees put their heads in the door to watch this milling pilgrimage of sick and healthy, rich and poor, men, women and children pouring down the narrow street.

"Look at the poor wretches!"

"What a misery to behold. I hope they will not be disappointed. God have mercy on them."

"God have mercy on us all. This is a dangerous thing."

"So it is. Tomorrow we must ask him to come before the council. We must know what this thing means."

The scribes and the Pharisees passed through the door

into the street and joined the crowd. It was obvious that the people had only been waiting for the Sabbath sundown, so that they might bring their sick ones to the new Healer. A shining light of excited expectation filled the drawn and wan faces of every sick person they could see.

Outside Peter's humble house the Master stood surrounded by a tightly packed crowd. It seemed as if the whole city was gathered at the door of the big fisherman.

The Nazarene eyed the masses with an expression of sad compassion infused with power. Then he bent over the sick and healed them, as the worshipful crowd kept its silence. The Healer had an encouraging word to all that received his help.

He worked in undisturbed calm till long after the stars filled the night sky over the Lake of Galilee.

5. Days of Gladness

IN THE PREDAWN stillness of the night, the young prophet walked slowly through the streets leading up into the hills above Capernaum. There he prayed.

In the early morning hours Peter and his companions awakened to find themselves alone. Without many words they dressed. They thought of the hills and of the wonderful things of the previous evening. Their Master had stood there surrounded by a whole admiring city. Even the scribes and the Pharisees had seemed glad to see the sick being healed.

As they walked out of Peter's house into the newborn day, they were greeted with warm smiles and cheery greetings from every side. Everyone talked with excited admiration of the healings done by the Master. They were walking, awake but yet as in a strange dream. Now they knew what the Kingdom of God was.

After some search they found the Master, alone, in the hills.

"Everyone is searching for you."

His young face met their joyous news with an inscrutable solemnity. After a while, he spoke to them:

"Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came."

His words were like those of a commander telling his soldiers the next move of his plan, yet without revealing the total picture of the planned campaign. There was a calm clear finality in his order, and they followed him the moment he began to move.

Along the road they were met by a leper who recognized the Master and came forward beseeching to be cleansed from his plague.

"If you will, you can make me clean."

Moved with pity, the Master stretched out his hand and touched him.

"I will; be clean."

Immediately cleansed, the man arose from his knees only to hear the stern warning:

"See that you say nothing to any man; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them."

Later, on their journey, Jesus and his companions found that the healed leper had grievously disobeyed the order given him. He ran through the villages telling all who would listen of his miraculous cleansing by the new prophet. Then, also, the tremendous news from the Sabbath in Capernaum had flown throughout the region, and large, fervent audiences gathered wherever they appeared.

The Galileans showed their enthusiasm by inviting them to their towns, their synagogues and their homes. They brought to him the sick, afflicted with various diseases and

pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics. He healed them. And his fame spread, day by day, wider and wider.

The disciples walked with him in glad awe. They felt welcome everywhere and when their little company left a village, its people would follow them well out into the countryside, overwhelming the Master with their astonished and sincere gratitude. The disciples thought of the hard and cold people of the capital and they felt proud of their fellow Galileans.

How different this Galilean mission was from the months they had traveled with him in Judea, immediately after leaving John the Baptist. Then there had still been a tenseness about them which now was a thing of the past. In Judea they themselves had tried to call the people to repentance and baptism, seeking to prepare the people for the great Day of the Lord.

Here there was no baptism of the repentant. People seemed willing to accept the glad news of the Kingdom. The journey was a continual feast and everywhere the shouting voices of the healed penetrated the air. Indeed, the kingdom had come, rich in miracles and full of promises.

Their Master had caught the imagination of his Galileans and the main street of every town seemed to have changed into a kingdom road. People were flocking to him from every quarter.

"He is home."

The word spread through the streets of teeming Capernaum.

His little company had arrived home in the evening, their sandals worn from many miles and the dust of the country

roads on their robes. The Galilean mission had ended for this time. The disciples thought it had been a marvelous journey, but they were not quite certain how their Master felt, for the journey had ended with his withdrawing, alone, for a long period of prayer in a lonely space.

No sooner had the news gone out that he had returned to Capernaum before men, women and children began to gather outside Peter's house. People kept coming till the house and the street were utterly crowded. Some scribes of the Pharisees had also arrived and were given seats inside the house.

The Master was again preaching the Word to the assembled crowd, when a peculiar thing happened on the roof. Four unknown men went to work on the boards of the roof making a wide square hole in the ceiling. While the crowd watched in amazed wonder, the four men lifted into view a pallet on which lay a sick man. Placing the pallet in the opening, they began to lower the sick man down before the Master.

There was a commotion among the crowd followed by a silence filled with the straining of curious eyes.

The Master gazed at the eager but cautious men on the roof. He saw their faith.

Then he looked at the patient, a paralytic, at his feet. He looked long as if he were a physician engaged in examining the suffering man. Then his clear voice sounded over the crowd and into the house.

"Son, your sins are forgiven."

There was a long moment of silence as the curious look of the faces changed into an expression of stunned perplexity. The scribes, sitting there, turned into scowling, angry spectators.

"Why does this man speak thus?"

"This is blasphemy!"

"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Their wordless questions of horror at the sacrilege were aimed at the Nazarene. He knew exactly what they were thinking.

With quiet anger, born of grief at their unbelief, he turned to the scribes with a masterful question.

"Why do you reason thus in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the sick, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or, 'Rise, take up your pallet, and walk?' "

Their eyes spoke with burning wrath but their lips remained silent.

Without waiting for an answer that would not come the Master again turned to the paralytic and said with holy force in his voice:

"But that ye may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins: I say to you, arise, take up your pallet and go your way to your house."

There was an immediate shout of jubilation and glorification of the God of Israel, as the healed man rolled up his pallet and went out before the eyes of the scribes and the multitude. The scribes were white with anger as the people shouted for gladness and fear, "We have seen strange things today."

During the weeks that followed, the Nazarene and his companions could be seen walking about in the town, always followed by admiring groups of people from all parts of Galilee. The Master became a beloved guest in their workshops, on the wharfs and in their homes. For the first time in

their lives, religion had become a living thing to them, something they talked about with joyful enthusiasm. His good news was the talk of the market place and many went to him in Peter's house to seek his advice and consolation.

The city fathers smiled with satisfaction and local pride whenever they talked about the new wonder-citizen, who in so short a time had made Capernaum the envy of all Galilee. The presence of thousands of pilgrims, coming to be near the prophet, had made the local trade skyrocket. The lodging-houses were filled to bursting capacity. Interpreters were busy telling the fabulous news in Greek, Syrian, Egyptian, and Latin to travelers who wanted to know what was happening in the town by the Lake of Galilee.

One day a disturbing rumor was noised about. Somebody had started the whisper that the Temple rulers in Jerusalem had sent spies into Galilee to keep watch on the prophet, but that must be only ridiculous talk. If there ever was a true Israelite it was this young prophet of Nazareth. He was both a patriot and a friend of the people. True enough, he was a reformer and he did not mince his words. But, then, it was about time that some voice was raised against the corruption they all knew was rampant in the land and not least in Jerusalem and Judea. Spies? Let them come. They would see that all Galilee would defend this man, true and kind, who went around doing good. And critics would, for once, hear someone who really knew how to preach the Word so that all who listened could understand what God had to tell them.

The spy scare soon disappeared like flotsam on the storm flood of an enthusiastic admiration.

The following Sabbath they again crowded to hear him preach.

"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

"Every one that hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it fell not, because it was founded upon a rock."

"And every one who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them, shall be likened to a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it."

As he finished, there was a long moment of speechless awe. Then a loud murmur stormed through the crowd.

"What a teacher!"

"What authority!"

"He certainly does not speak as the scribes. This is something new in Israel."

The most hated place in town was the customs house. No citizen passed it without cursing it. This was one place in town where they felt the iron claw of the Roman Eagle. They hated every step they had to take on days when they were forced to go and pay their taxes to the alien rulers that had overpowered their nation.

On this point they all agreed with the patriotic Pharisees, who had taught them that the most abominable characters in

the world were assassins, robbers and taxgatherers. And they all followed the unwritten law of treating the tax collectors as lepers.

Their town was also cursed with some of those traitors who had sold their Galilean souls to the Romans for silver. How any man could choose to become a tax collector—a traitor to God's chosen people—was utterly beyond their power of reasoning. When passing such outcasts in the streets, they turned away and flung the flaps of their robes around themselves in violent disgust.

The hatred was mutual, for the native tax collectors had long since learned their lesson of self-protection and survival. They formed their own society within a society which hated them and scorned them. Let the righteous talk and spit! Let the Pharisees instruct their people how to treat them with hate and contempt! Let the synagogue close its doors to them, and let the zealots try to stab them in dark alleys after closing time!

On occasion they felt an inner pain at being shunned by their own countrymen, particularly on days when thousands of pilgrims passed down Main Street on their way to the feasts in Jerusalem. In such moments they sensed a deep and lonely longing in their hearts to see the Holy City again. But the feeling soon blew away and they violently reassured themselves that it was not necessary to trek miles upon miles to seek God's face. If God was a spirit, He could not be locked up in the Temple. And what about the Temple rulers, the Sadducees, who were growing immensely wealthy through their collaboration with the Emperor's men? Why did people have to hate people like themselves who only eked out a bare living?

At that thought they congratulated themselves on the staunch friendship which they enjoyed in their own circles. After all, life had its brighter moments; they were not lost like the uneducated mob. They could read and write Greek and Latin; they could handle money of many kinds and submit long, accurate reports to their superiors. They met men of many nations and were well informed about happenings in far distant lands.

When evening fell, their crowd would gather and discuss the happenings of the day at merry parties. They would eat and drink well and make merry till long after the dull and respectable people of the town had gone to sleep.

One day a most fantastic thing happened in the customs-house. Levi, the son of Alphaeus, was just going over his receipts, when the prophet from Nazareth appeared, surrounded by his companions, in front of the customs. The Master walked straight to Levi's table, gazed at him for a moment and uttered an invitation:

"Follow me."

Without a word, without any hesitation, the young Jewish tax gatherer rose from his seat, left the money, and walked away with the group, which disappeared as quickly as it had come.

Before sunset the astonishing and frightening news had been carried around town that Levi, the tax collector, had joined the Nazarene and that the convert had scheduled a great feast to celebrate the occasion. Rumor had it that even the prophet himself would be present at the supper. But that must be loose and malicious talk, for to eat with a man at his table was to become his brother. And a teacher who, in their own synagogue, had preached the undying power of

the Law would certainly not contradict everything he had said by stooping to defile himself with the company of sinners.

However, when the sun set, a great party was in progress in the house of Levi, who was also called Matthew. Laughter and eager conversation rang through the open doors into the street and the garden behind the house. The prophet was there.

In the festive light from many oil lamps, the shocked citizens could see him plainly, reclining calmly at the table of the cursed tax collector. He was surrounded by many known publicans and there were many new arrivals of questionable character as twilight waned into night. There were men and women whom all knew what they were and with whom no one would ever have thought that a true man of God would want to be seen.

Some indignant citizens sent for the Pharisees and the scribes to come and see the obnoxious scandal for themselves. To any right-thinking Israelite it must now be obvious that this kind of person should never again be permitted to teach in their synagogue. If this Nazarene wished to mingle with the excommunicated, then it would henceforth be a blasphemy to let him sit in the holy place of God.

The uninvited spectators could not hear the conversation of Matthew and his dinner guests, but they observed how undisturbedly happy they all were. It was plain to the staring eyes of the good citizens that the prophet was feeling perfectly at home in this contaminated crowd. How could he!

Upon their arrival on the scene, the scribes and the Pharisees heard the scornful remarks and saw the pointed fingers of the spying citizens.

"Look, he eats with publicans and sinners!"

"Hear how they are enjoying themselves!"

"And this man calls himself a teacher!"

Sensing the explosive situation, the Pharisees cornered one of the prophet's disciples surrounding him with outraged horror in their faces.

"Why does your Master eat with tax collectors and sinners?" they demanded with all the emphasis of hurt moral feelings. Their stern question carried through the door into the happy atmosphere of the nocturnal feast.

Immediately the Master arose from the table and turning to the Pharisees answered them in a calm voice full of burning conviction:

"They that are well need not a physician, but they that are sick. Go and learn what that means, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The outraged guardians of the law eyed him with flaming contempt, turned and disappeared in the night.

In the house of one of the scribes they held a serious discussion far into the night about this Nazarene, who called himself the Son of man, healed all diseases, forgave sin and now had proceeded to break down the strongest barriers which they had tried to build in order to keep their people in the way of the Lord. They admitted that they were confused but that the matter now had become one for the leaders in Jerusalem to investigate.

"I am beginning to hate this man." The violent words came from a young rabbinical student, his eyes flaming with scorn.

"Son of Levi, measure your words."

"No, I won't; not as long as this Jesus of Nazareth is bent on destroying all the safeguards of our fathers' faith. I am young and my voice should remain silent in the councils of my elders, but can't you see that wherever this Nazarene goes there will no longer be any barriers between sinners and righteous men. He is tearing down the walls between the good people and those who have fallen away from the Holy One of Israel."

"That accusation is not quite fair. You forget that he attends the synagogue each Sabbath."

"But why? I beg of you. Only to break asunder the teachings of the fathers. Did you not hear his new interpretation of the ten commandments? Why, he made us all stand accused of breaking every one of them. He is a cursed perfectionist, who does not understand that the commandments are our rules of good conduct. The Law is our way unto salvation."

"Well spoken, Son of Levi. I am old enough to know that the Law is the set of rules which the Most High has given to his people Israel, that we may live by the Law. If the Law goes, Israel is finished."

"Come now, both of you. You heard this man say that not even one iota of the Law should be made void. Calm yourselves."

"How can you be calm when you see how this new teacher, who pretends to defend the Law, sits down to fellowship with this Matthew and his uncouth company? How a truly religious man can lower himself to befriend publicans and sinners is beyond me."

Most of the listeners nodded their eager consent, but the aged Simeon, their former synagogue leader, shook his white

beard. Then he spoke in a mild and calm voice, "The Most High is a merciful Lord, who forgives transgressions and remembers his covenant with Abraham. Truly, you err when you forget how he promised our father Abraham that in the latter days all nations shall be blessed in Abraham. Also, as the prophet has foretold, the days shall come when all the peoples of the earth shall walk in the Way and come to the holy city of Jerusalem. Do not belittle the true promises of the Most High."

"And what have these promises to do with this Jesus of Nazareth?"

"My son, I have grown too old to think of myself that I should fathom the mysteries of the Holy One. He makes his own plans—but I for one would not be found fighting against his will."

All looked at Simeon. Incredible consternation stood written on their faces.

"Then you too believe in this man from Nazareth?"

After a while, the answer came with the serene independence of an old man, "I believe what I see. You all know how he healed my grandson of his palsy—and frankly, if he has power from on high to lead this publican Matthew and his friends back to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, should we not rejoice?"

For a moment the room filled with voices of men, all speaking at the same time. At length they quieted down and joined in the late evening meal which their women had prepared, while the men had been debating.

During the weeks which followed, the disciples sensed that somehow the popularity of their Master had advanced

greatly. More and more, the common people had started to talk among themselves of the Nazarene as the real friend of the common folks. They had come to believe that he would free them from their chains and lead them forth to a kingdom where there would no more be any poor nor anyone to lord it over them. He had made them feel that they were all, every one of them, important. When they thought of him, they straightened their backs and felt that he had given them a hope which they had never dreamed would come to their wretched lives. Blessed be the Lord of Israel who had remembered the chains of His prisoners and who had sent His messenger to make fishermen, toilers, and publicans sit in the places of the high and mighty and to walk before His face forever.

With the keen instinct of the common people they had come to realize that the Nazarene was bringing them the glad tidings of a new world for them and their children's children. Thus they followed him with a new and deep enthusiasm.

His fame spread to every village in Galilee and the traders carried the news of his mighty works to Damascus, Tyre, and perhaps to many distant lands, beyond the great sea.

One day as he was preaching, some followers of John the Baptist came and asked him a question.

"Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

The Master looked at his disciples with a look of warm and true gratitude before he answered the question. Then he spoke in a happy and firm tone:

"Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?"

Matthew turned to Peter, a broad smile over his young intelligent face.

"But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast."

His disciples pondered what that dark prophecy might mean as the Master raised his voice and made a declaration for all to hear:

"No one sews a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for the patch will tear the garment and the tear is made worse."

"Neither do men put new wine into old wine skins; else, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine runs out and the skins are destroyed; but new wine in new wine skins!"

As his strange words died away, the listeners stood in perplexed silence. Even the disciples' faces had an empty look. The words had been clear and simple enough, but they carried a new and mysterious message which none of them could grasp. He was trying to tell them something.

The next few days, the Master and his companions were, once again, occupied with one of the many short mission travels on which he led them through the heavily populated region close to his new hometown. Again it was the Sabbath and they were returning to Capernaum. Walking through the grainfields above the town, the hungry disciples began to pluck ears of grain to eat. It had been an extremely busy tour of teaching and healing, and the meals had been hurried and far between.

Suddenly they heard an angry cry from across the field, and discovered some Pharisees appearing at the rim of the field, their condemning faces clearly visible in the morning sun.

"Look, your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath!"

Jesus looked at the grain in the disciples' hands as he kept on going through the field, heading straight toward the shouting accusers. He realized that in the eyes of the Pharisees his companions were guilty of the crime of threshing and milling on a Sabbath.

Coming closer to their accusers, Peter and the others felt a contemptuous anger well up within them. Those religious spies, they should talk! With their sitting religion and their leisure, what did they know of the hunger which people feel, who work incessantly and walk the long, weary miles?

Presently Jesus reached the accusing Pharisees and his disciples immediately formed a ring behind him. He spoke with the freedom of a courage which his companions had never ceased to admire.

"Have you never read what David did?"

The Pharisees stood silent in perplexity.

"When he was in need and was hungry, he and they that were with him? How he entered into the house of God, in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate of the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to those who were with him?"

The disciples relaxed as they pulled up a little closer behind their Master. They felt themselves well defended as they gazed at their defeated, silent accusers.

The Master continued, this time with solemn emphasis on every word:

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also over the Sabbath."

A moment later he passed the glum Pharisees and proceeded on his way, followed by his happy disciples. Down the road, some of them turned to see their accusers gesticulating wildly in the air. It was obvious that they had been defeated.

6. God's Finger

THE MAN with the withered arm felt ill at ease. The synagogue was filling fast and he noticed how the men eyed him with startled contempt and then turned to one another in whispering comments about his presence in the synagogue. He was rarely present at the services and he realized that the faithful were watching him today with malicious surprise.

The fact was that the rulers of the synagogue had entreated him to be present on this Sabbath and had hinted that his coming to the house of God might do his withered arm some good. A miracle worker was in town and things might happen. The Pharisees had spoken vaguely and in dark words, when they pressed him into accepting their invitation. They had not promised anything definite, but they had welcomed him this Sabbath morning with an exuberant courtesy as if he were an important worshipper. He had not liked their politeness, but he had let them guide him to a place close to the dais. Looking at their group he saw them engaged in a lively conversation, their faces aglow with something close to hilarity.

Suddenly the Pharisees turned their eyes toward the entrance and as smiles of eager joy filled their faces, they nodded imperceptibly to each other. The Nazarene had arrived and was being ushered to a seat near the dais.

At length, the ruler of the synagogue called on the prophet, who immediately rose, his clear eyes bright with holy determination. The man with the withered arm shifted uneasily in his chair.

From the beginning of the service the Nazarene had felt the watching eyes of the leaders. He had read their thoughts and understood. The man with the withered hand was cunningly used by them. They had placed him here at the front.

One of the Pharisees leaned forward and spoke in a voice of sweet mockery.

"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on the prophet, eager to see how he would meet the tricky situation. They knew that the Sabbath regulations of the elders said that medical service was not permissible except in extreme cases where death seemed imminent. They all stared at the withered arm. The crowd down by the exit stood tip-toe to watch the impending drama.

The initial answer was a counter question, as the young prophet faced the leaders.

"What man is there among you, that has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, who will not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep?"

The audience smiled and nodded their approval, as they watched the Pharisees, their vacant eyes revealing how piqued they were.

Turning to the man with the withered hand, the Master gazed at him firmly and ordered him to stand. Again Jesus addressed the Pharisees, his voice filled with calm victory.

"Now I ask you: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?"

His adversaries remained silent. As he looked at them with holy anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, their eyes kept shifting from the withered arm to the confident faces of the audience filling the synagogue.

"Stretch out your arm!"

He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

After a moment of shocked awe, followed by ecstatic Hosannahs, the service broke up in tumult. Filled with fury, the defeated Pharisees disappeared through a side exit.

The disciples, who had witnessed many healings, immediately observed how different this had been. In earlier cases the Master had shown his compassion for the suffering, answering their faith and their prayers by making them whole. Today, however, he had not even stopped to ask about the man's faith, but had proceeded to give his powerful command of healing straightway in the faces of the insidious enemies. It was as if the patient Master wanted to have the Pharisees and the people know that the finger of God was at work, whether they believed or not.

Once free of the glaring stares of the masses, the scribes and the Pharisees rushed into a frantic conference on how to stop this dangerous Nazarene before he completely destroyed their chosen nation. Panic and confusion, helplessness and hatred permeated their heated discussions.

"Time has come to destroy him once and for all."

"Cursed be the man who breaks the Law of the Sabbath."

"The curse of the Highest One be upon us, if we do not save our people from this evil one."

"Amen, Amen."

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one God. I would rather die than transgress His commandments."

They spoke with burning sincerity, their souls in panic, as they felt how the existence of their whole nation was put in jeopardy by this frightening new prophet. Fear and anger, horror and revenge made them rave and rage. At length, having calmed down, their minds began to work again, as it behooved intelligent and educated men.

"He won this round."

"He seems to win all arguments. And he is loved by the people."

"Cursed be the people who do not know the Law."

"Calm yourselves. I have been thinking of Rabbi Gamaliel, my blessed teacher. He told us always to remember, 'The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.' Let us now have done with folly. Let us not forget that the Holy One is watching over His Israel. Enemies of the Law have never conquered us. I am an old man and I have seen Messiahs come and go. They all have their little day. Then they are gone, for the wind passes over them and their place knows them no more."

The old man's eyes shone brightly with calm assurance, as he observed that his words of reason tamed their anxiety. Then he continued, not without irony, "Your little scheme today back-fired. Our friend got his withered hand healed, while you were humiliated before the congregation of God.

I have been young and I have known humiliation before men. It is bitter bread, but it is given by the hand of God. Now—as I see our situation, I believe that we are facing a much more difficult thing than we seem to grasp. We have here a prophet, and prophets have always been difficult men to control. They go their own way and their preaching is often violent. They are the zealots of the Lord, and I fear that in our day we do not know how to cope with a man of prophecy and power. Let us not forget that we have not had a true prophet in Israel for four hundred years."

"But we have the Law and the Prophets. And the traditions of the elders," a young Pharisee tried to object.

"True, true . . . but if my memory serves me right, the Nazarene has put himself squarely behind the Law, even until the last iota."

"But he despises the holy traditions and teaches the people to do likewise."

"I have observed this weakness in him, and it has filled my heart with sadness, for he is a good man and he is awakening our people. I pray that one day he may learn to lead his flock into the way of our fathers. Give them time, and God have mercy on his people of Israel. I am an old man and I now beg of you to let me leave."

They rose in reverent silence, as he walked slowly toward the door. They were courteous, but their faces were non-committal and empty as he closed the door.

"Poor old Jude."

"Yes, age gives wisdom of sorts, but it also dims the mind, so that it can no longer see the real issues."

"The only point I liked was what he said about the false Messiahs and their little days. That was a comfort."

"Yes, but don't forget that somebody had to stop them. And who is going to put this new madman out of the way, if we sit idly by and let him lead all Galilee astray?"

"True enough, but he has not called a rebellion, yet."

"The Nazarene will never use violence. He is not that kind of man. He is a preacher of meekness and peace. What would he look like in front of a rebellious army?"

"This is too serious a matter to laugh about. He has a brilliant mind and is surrounded by thousands of followers who believe in him."

"I would not go so far as to say that they really believe in him. People may admire him as a glib speaker and they love to use him as a healer, but he has not yet conquered the Galileans. The only ones who have really been caught in his net are a few coarse and ignorant fishermen and that traitor Matthew and a few women. He is not going to crush the Roman Empire with that scum. But I would suggest that we immediately send a report to the priests in Jerusalem. This thing is getting too big and dangerous for us to handle alone."

The last suggestion met with the spontaneous approval of all present. They dictated a four-point memorandum, listing the accusations which could be substantiated:

"This new teacher breaks the Sabbath willfully, telling people that he is lord even over the Sabbath."

"He has publicly committed gross blasphemy by saying that he has power on earth to forgive sin."

"He breaks all the kosher rules, eating in the houses of sinners and nonpracticing Jews."

"He desecrates the synagogue by his violent attacks on the righteous people of the Law."

They added an urgent appeal for expert help in combatting this destroyer of the Law.

When the document was finished, they read the message aloud with a sense of real relief and gave it to a Levite, who was to leave the following day for his term of service in Jerusalem.

"I think this action is a master stroke."

"Certainly, Jerusalem will know what to do."

"Yes, old Jude was right. This disturber will pass."

"Amen, amen! People will forget him. And when he is forgotten, our people will go on forever as if this Nazarene had never existed."

They all thought the last prophecy was a wise and good saying, and they felt calm and cheered.

After sundown, they sent a delegation to the Herodians, whom they hated, to inquire whether they could count on their help in suppressing this fanatical prophet and his wild movement.

The political henchmen of Herod Antipas listened to their plea with faint interest.

When the emissaries of the Pharisees praised Herod Antipas for having arrested John the Baptist, the Herodians looked bored and told the Pharisees with ironical delight that Antipas never visited the Machaerus bastion without engaging in interested conversations with the imprisoned Baptist.

As for this Jesus, the Herodians thought that he was a harmless and well-meaning man, whose main occupation was to heal the sick. In fact, they had recently been told by a delegation from the medical baths at Tiberias that their business was suffering from the competition of this new healer, but

added that they knew Antipas too well to imagine that the ruler would let himself become personally involved in such minor matters.

The shocked scribes and Pharisees departed in disgust. How Godless and indifferent could these collaborationist politicians get? After this, however, they knew that they would have to depend upon themselves and their trust in the God of Israel, if they wanted to save their people.

They were at war.

A few days later, Jesus and his companions left Capernaum walking north along the zig-zagging highway through the low hills along the lake. They engaged in lively conversation, and the happy disciples sensed that the Master was taking them into new regions and new victories.

At the neighboring town of Chorazin the Master and his companions were immediately surrounded by an eager and friendly crowd, pleading with him to stay with them for a few days, teaching them of the Kingdom and healing their sick. In this backward Galilean town, which had neither the population nor the wealth of Capernaum, they were confronted with the appalling poverty and squalor of a town which had not had ambition or luck enough to make anything of itself. The crowds in the market place looked beaten and harassed, like sheep without a shepherd. And yet the disciples found that their Master showed no hesitancy in moving freely and deliberately right in the midst of them. He shared their sorrows and ate at their frugal tables. He had a cheerful word to the young and a compassionate smile for the mothers and their ragged children. He had come as a friend and they gave him their love as they milled around him.

An audacious mother suddenly held her tiny child up in front of him, asking the prophet to bless it.

He did. But no sooner had he ended the blessing of the child before the whole scene boiled with arms of mothers stretching their children toward him, pushing and stampeding in a chorus of loud pleas for his blessing. As the riotous street scene grew, his disciples ran to his help, rebuking the mothers and pushing them aside.

Then the Master spoke.

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the Kingdom of Heaven."

Happy smiles filled the grateful faces of the mothers surrounding him, as his surprised disciples silently stepped aside. They realized that they had been publicly rebuked, but they did not mind. They marvelled at the Master's strange word, which they would never forget, that the Kingdom of Heaven was for children, too.

A sacred stillness filled the town square, as the prophet laid his hands on the children around him and blessed them individually in the name of the Holy One.

At length, he left Chorazin and continued on his way together with his companions.

As the days went by the disciples never ceased to wonder at the glory which had so suddenly been revealed to them. The Kingdom of God was a living thing of love and adventure. It had a message to all, to the healthy and the sick, to men and women, to children and the demon-possessed.

As the weeks went by, they continued their mission journeys, and the Master's fame spread. The crowds grew by a great influx of curious, excited travelers from every part of Galilee and from Decapolis, Jerausalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan. In fact, one Sabbath as they were leaving a synagogue where he had taught the people, the disciples heard that there had been present in the audience Jews even from Tyre and Sidon on the coast of the Great Sea.

When they told him this news, he had remained standing in thoughtful meditation for a long while, as if gazing into a far-away future. Then he spoke:

"The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few;

pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The disciples looked perplexed. There it was again, this strange linking of earth and heaven, which seemed to distinguish all his work and his life. Every morning he would leave them alone and go to a lonely place to pray. And when, at length, he reappeared, they would meet him with the reverent silence of humble people, who realized that they did not know the real secret of the Master to whom they had committed their lives and fortunes.

At times they had half a mind to ask him to give them some inkling of the plan which he had for his kingdom and their part in it. But then another new day was calling them, as they followed him into the crisp morning air, walking the green valleys of their beloved Galilee.

These were days and weeks of intensive campaigning, broken only by the nocturnal rest under the open sky or in some friend's house as the weeks turned, marked by the quiet of the Sabbath in the synagogues.

It was evident that the whole region was aflame with the strange expectancy which he had carried with him into the dull lives of the people. His words and healings dominated the imagination of this independent and faithful people which he as a Galilean could call his own. They met him with the joyful acceptance of men and women who had been awakened to the stirrings of a great event. Their young were enchanted and the devout old people saw the hand of God touching their nation anew. These were times like the days of Elijah and Isaiah, perhaps even like the miraculous years of the greatest of all of God's prophets, Moses. They

wondered and wondered. And someone reminded them of the ancient promise given through the prophet Isaiah:

"The land Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
toward the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned."

This visitation of God's new prophet might, after all, be the promised Dawn for their people of Israel. As they looked at the fearless and friendly Nazarene a sacred hope quivered through their hearts. They could well understand how their young people had been kindled through him with an eagerness born of a longing for a supreme adventure. So they gladly gave their parental permission to their young to follow the prophet for a few days as he walked on to the next towns. They would pack a little food for them and smile as they saw them run down the highway to catch up with the pilgrim crowd, led by the prophet.

When they, after a day or two, returned home, a wild surge of golden dreams in their hearts, they kept their kinsmen enchanted with the story of what they had seen and heard. Entranced with young enthusiasm, they told of the prophet himself, so kind and friendly, of his marvelous talks, of his incredible miracles. Wherever the prophet went he seemed to change the people around him into one great happy family. Even bad people, the untouchables, were welcomed into his company, and nobody jeered or resented their presence.

One day as they were about to cross the *Via Maris,* the great ancient highway between Damascus and Acre, the Master led his disciples up on a hill by the side of the road. From the top of the hill they had a commanding view of the busy trade route running north and south, skirting the upper end of the Lake of Galilee.

As they sat down to rest, he seemed intensely fascinated by the life on the highway below. They sat for a long time watching the unending traffic . . . Greek and Syrian traders . . . camel trains moving south to a sea-side port . . . a Roman courier galloping by on a wet horse . . . more traders, moving north—strange men from a far-away eastern country . . . a cohort of Roman soldiers marching north to relieve some outpost of the Roman empire . . . beggars stopping to ask the travelers for a coin or a piece of bread. . . . It was truly an ever-changing panorama reflecting many nations and many races.

At length the Master turned to his companions and stretching his hand out over the busy highway, he told them a strange story.

"With what shall we liken the Kingdom of God? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all shrubs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may make nests under its shadow."

There was an exuberant tone in his voice as he spoke; his face shone in radiant assurance as he rose and began walking down the hill.

When they rejoined the crowds waiting for them, they noticed that many new listeners had appeared. He began to

teach the multitudes, and all who heard him hearkened to his words.

Later, as the people dispersed for the day, a scribe came up to the disciples, engaging them in a conversation.

"You are his disciples?"

"Yes, we are."

"How long have you been with him?"

"Some months now."

The disciples glanced at one another with smiles radiant with the memories of their golden experiences in his fellowship.

"Tell me, when does his kingdom come in its glory?"

"We do not know."

"But, come now, he must surely have told you."

"He has not."

"And yet you are going along? Why?"

"He has power over one."

Square-shouldered Peter had just finished his answer, as the Master came passing by. With a sudden resolve, the inquiring scribe turned swiftly to the Master, admiration and enthusiasm in his eager eyes.

"Rabbi, I will follow you wherever you go."

The Master heard his declaration and stopped to gaze at him with the inscrutable insight with which he read men's intentions and characters. There was a moment of silent examination.

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

It was obvious that the answer had hurt. As the scribe left the scene, dazed in humiliation and moral frustration,

he did not notice another young man approaching the Rabbi with rapid steps.

"Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go bid farewell to those at my home."

Matthew, Peter and the others thought of the hour he had called them, and with a worried expression, they waited for the negative answer. They knew in their heart of hearts that the Master could not use hesitant men.

"No one who has put his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

As dusk fell, the Master and his companions made their way to a friend's house to stay overnight. As they were walking up the street to the humble home, two shadowy figures appeared from behind a neighbor's house. They had apparently been waiting for him.

In the settling night their unsteady walk told the alert disciples that the two approaching men were either drunk or blind. A moment later a pitiful, loud cry rent the stillness of the evening.

"Thou Son of David, have mercy on us!"

Jesus approached the two blind men, laid his hands on their shoulders, and talking as a doctor talks to his patients, he invited them to follow him to the house where he was staying.

The host had made his home festive and bright with extra oil lamps used on days of feasts or great family occasions. As the Master entered he greeted him with a warm-hearted "Peace," the sacred kiss of welcome. Led by the disciples, the two blind men followed.

Immediately Jesus turned and looked at the dead eyes

before him. Then he lifted his eyes to heaven in a moment of silent prayer.

"Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

The blind men spoke in unison with feverish anticipation.

"Yes, Lord."

The Master looked at them with an infinite compassion mingled with power, as he reached out his hands and touched the eyes of both men simultaneously.

"According to your faith be it done to you."

Their blind eyes sprang to life. They had stood the test of faith in the Master. They stared at the Healer and then, turning around, looked with a broad smile at the disciples and the family of the host, until the room suddenly was filled with the happy laughter of the new-born amazement of the two healed men. They could really see!

Suddenly the Master's face turned serious in the extreme, as he gave the two men a stern warning.

"See that no one knows it."

As they departed, their steps brisk, the host closed the door behind them and announced that the evening meal was ready.

As they reclined at the supper table, the disciples realized that the family had made every effort to make the meal into a feast in honor of the high and beloved guest. The women in the house were being assisted by Mary of Magdala and Susanna, whom the Master had healed. For some time now, the women had followed him volunteering their glad services in token of their undying gratitude for what he had done for them. The disciples also knew that help was forthcoming from Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod Antipas'

steward, since she was eager to help the Master's work with her means.

After the meal, Peter, Matthew and John walked quietly out into the crisp and invigorating air of the Galilean evening, finding a place under some eucalyptus trees above the sleeping town. Seating themselves, they were soon totally absorbed in examining one another carefully as to the words which the Master had said and the works which he had done. They went over the story, again and again. They wanted to be certain that they could tell others with faithful accuracy exactly what their Master had said, and exactly what had happened. They had become overwhelmed with a sense of the significance and divine import of these things, and their young minds memorized the sacred sayings and the mighty deeds of him, whom they had chosen to follow.

The Galilean night sang with a thousand soft noises above them, as they this evening added to their mental treasure house the story of the two blind men, who had just received their sight at the healing hand of the Master.

The New People

7. The Twelve

ONE EVENING, a little later, as their mission had returned on the west side of the Lake of Galilee, a strange thing happened. When the night deepened, the Master left his disciples in the house where they were lodging. He stayed away all night.

At day-break the disciples and the crowds, searching for him, found him on a hillside, where he had passed the night in lonely prayer. Before long the hillside was filled with people, his disciples up closest to him, the milling throng of men, women, and children down below. A gentle morning breeze whistled softly through sycamore trees; the morning sun made the northern mountains stand clear and blue against the horizon.

As the mission journey had progressed through Galilee, the flock of companions had increased, until this morning there was gathered around him a considerable number of men and women.

The crowds were waiting for him to begin his morning teaching, but he did not move. The disciples sensed that his whole being radiated that strange, other-worldly power and

peace, which they had seen in him so often when he had spent a night in solitary prayer.

At length a deep, reverent silence fell over the entire scene. All eyes were fixed on the lonely prophet sitting above them. Then he proceeded to speak.

The startled listeners immediately discovered that this morning he was not teaching but was calling the names of certain disciples, inviting them to come up to him, one by one:

First, Peter, the impulsive broad-shouldered fisherman from the fishing harbor of Capernaum's Bethsaida.

His brother Andrew, calm and resolute.

John, the thoughtful son of the well-to-do fisherman Zebedee.

His brother James, a fiery and eager youth.

Next, Philip, slow but practical, also from Bethsaida.

Batholomew, also called Nathaniel, an educated and critical soul, from Cana.

Thomas, cautious, a lover of facts.

Matthew, the reborn tax-collector, literate and dependable.

James, the son of Alpheus, another changed tax-collector, called the Big-hearted.

Judas Thadaeus.

Simon, an enthusiastic Zealot.

The last name called was Judas Iscariot, the only non-Galilean included. The Master's deep eyes followed him, as he came up the hill to take his appointed place among the Twelve.

There they stood, all young, all called by the Master's inscrutable and personal choice.

In the intense silence that followed he told them that from this day on they would be with him always and that they were solemnly appointed to be the Master's apostles or delegates, empowered to preach and authorized to cast out demons.

Before the crowd had time to ponder what this strange moment meant, the Master had risen. He began his sermon of ordination, looking at the twelve with a sacred and royal determination:

> Blessed are the poor in spirit,
> for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
>
> Blessed are those who mourn,
> for they shall be comforted.
>
> Blessed are the meek,
> for they shall inherit the earth.
>
> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,
> for they shall be filled.
>
> Blessed are the merciful,
> for they shall obtain mercy.
>
> Blessed are the pure in heart,
> for they shall see God.
>
> Blessed are the peacemakers,
> for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for right-
eousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you
and persecute you, and shall say all manner
of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad:
for great is your reward in heaven,
for so persecuted they the prophets
who were before you.

Ye are the salt of the earth;
but if the salt has lost its savour,
wherewith shall it be salted?
It is thenceforth good for nothing
except to be cast out and to be
trodden under foot by men.

Ye are the light of the world.
A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.
Nor do men light a candle and put it
under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and
it gives light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men,
that they may see your good works
and glorify your Father
which is in heaven.

During the weeks that followed, the apostles were struggling with conflicting emotions of pride and humility. They became ever more deeply aware of the fact that their Master, by his own sovereign will, had set them apart both from the rest of the disciples and from the ever-shifting crowds which surrounded him. Neither could they help but notice that the other disciples began to pay them extraordinary respect and at times they fell into a sweet pride at their new position, until they suddenly felt a stinging pain in their hearts at the terrifying thought of the great obligation which the Master had laid upon them. Henceforth, they should be the salt of the earth and practice meekness, purity, and mercy. They thought of how selfish they were by nature, and were frightened.

The startling news that the Nazarene had chosen and ordained twelve men to be his apostles soon flew on the wings of hurried rumor throughout the whole region. The number twelve was immediately understood to have reference to the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel.

Was the prophet of Nazareth setting up a new Israel? Was the old to disappear?

The devout individuals among his great following insisted that this was exactly the meaning of what had happened on the day when he had called his twelve apostles. With gladness in their voices they explained to any one who would listen that just as the twelve sons of Jacob had become the twelve tribes of Israel, so the Master had chosen twelve apostles, who would grow into twelve tribes of a new and greater Israel. The stunned and curious listeners were reminded of the ancient prophecy of Jeremiah that in the

latter days the Holy One would make a new covenant with the house of Israel, different from the old covenant, and that He would write His Law upon the hearts of men.

When some listeners scoffed at this megalomaniac idea, the devout disciples would repeat the Master's clear words about the pure of heart, the meek and the peace-makers, who were to become the citizens of this new kingdom. It was something completely new on earth and should be obvious to any one who understood Moses and the prophets.

Alone with themselves, however, even the most enthusiastic of the disciples were inwardly frightened at the new turn of events. They could not quite understand how the Master could expect ordinary people, such as they, to become perfect in soul and in practice. It disturbed them deeply that he seemed to expect his followers to become like the angels, who stand always before the face of God.

Even so they refused to worry, as others among his devout followers did, about how the Romans and the Pharisees would react to the Master's courageous appointment of the twelve apostles. True enough, there were rumors that his action had been ill received in high quarters. To the rulers in Jerusalem it had apparently been especially obnoxious that the Nazarene was now speaking of the whole world as his mission field.

The cautious souls among the disciples had begun to warn his more enthusiastic followers that it was a premature and unwise thing to challenge the high and mighty, as long as his movement was so utterly lacking in strength and prestige. It mattered not how much the enthusiasts tried to explain that the Master, by his word and works, had shown that God was with him. The cautious kept insisting, however,

that this world was still ruled by faithless, cunning and powerful men. They were anxious for him.

Little by little, their anxiety and caution began to affect their attitude as they resolved not to become too involved in the new phase of the Nazarene movement. They recalled what had happened both to Judas of Gamala and now recently to John the Baptist, who was rotting in the prison at Machaerus.

They thought of the uncertainties of the future and shuddered.

One day, as Jesus and the Twelve were working in the small villages nestling in the hills near Capernaum, his teaching was interrupted by a delegation from that city. The group included some of the elders who had remained friendly to the Master in spite of the insidious remarks of the other Pharisees. As he halted his teaching, the delegation came forward to face him.

"Rabbi, a centurion of our town begged us to go to you on this errand of mercy. He has a slave of whom he is very fond. Neither the centurion nor his slave are of our people, but the centurion is a friend of Israel and the slave is paralyzed and ill, at the point of death. He is in terrible distress."

The Master had listened in silent surprise to the plea of the elders and now he seemed to hesitate.

"Please, Rabbi, come! This centurion is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our people and he helped us build our synagogue."

"I will come and heal him."

Swiftly the Master began to descend the hill toward the city, followed by the huge crowd. They were surprised that

the prophet would have anything to do with a heathen. Some of the crowd agreed with the elders that this centurion was a friendly soul and that he had been kind and considerate as long as he had been stationed in their town. But the man was, after all, a pagan and he kept slaves, which was an abomination in Israel.

At a turn in the road they were met by a new delegation from the centurion's house.

"Lord, we are friends of the centurion. He has sent us to tell you: 'Do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; therefore I did not think myself worthy to come to you. But just say a word, and my servant shall be healed.' That is the message he asked us to convey."

Jesus wondered and continued on his way.

As they approached the centurion's home in the hills on the outskirts of the town, the curiosity of the crowd was greatly aroused, but most of them stopped short of the pagan's stone-fenced premises, since they refused to be contaminated by walking into the courtyard of a heathen. But they could see and hear what was about to happen, as Jesus and the Twelve without hesitation walked toward the entrance of the luxurious house.

Suddenly the centurion appeared in the door. He was every inch a soldier. Lifting his right arm, he stepped out into the courtyard and saluted the Master. It was a scene of military precision.

"Lord, we are not worthy to have you come under our roof. But say the word, and my servant shall be healed. For I am also a man set under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say unto one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another,

'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this he marvelled at him. Then he turned with calm majesty to the sea of watching faces along the fence and spoke to them in a firm, glad voice.

"I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not even in Israel."

Angry silence met his words, as he continued, his voice stern and clear.

"I say unto you, many will come from the east and the west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

Without waiting for any reaction from the crowd, he turned again to the centurion with a grateful smile and said in a sure and crisp voice, "Thy servant will live!"

Then be beckoned to the Twelve, who turned to follow him out of the gate. At the foot of the hill one of the apostles turned to see the huge crowd lingering on, apparently engaged in heated discussions about the Master and his strange ways.

The thirteen men entered the gate of the city.

A little later, the spies of the Pharisees stole into town with new stories about the outrageous Nazarene, who seemed to use every opportunity to defy the established regulations. Before the local scribes and Pharisees the spies competed with one another to give details of the horrid events of the day.

"We have just seen him defile himself by walking into the courtyard of a heathen, he and his twelve conspirators. We of the true faith would rather die than contaminate ourselves by entering the place of a pagan. He might at least

have stopped at the gate and asked the centurion to come out."

"Not only that. If he were a true prophet, he would have told this infidel that heathen people have no part nor share in the blessings of the people of God. Our law says so."

"Worse is yet to come. Instead of telling the centurion of the glory of our nation, he deliberately insulted our people in front of the pagans."

"Yes, that is a fact. Here are his incredible and evil words. I wrote them down, then and there. He actually said, 'Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not even in Israel.' "

"He said that? He has the Devil!"

"He also added with a scornful, bitter voice, that many will come from the east and the west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

"He blasphemes!"

"He is a traitor to God's people."

"He is a dangerous man. I had somehow hoped that he might have changed his ways and helped us uphold the Law and the prophets."

"He change? Never, never!"

"Not any more! He has picked out some simpletons and tax-collectors whom he calls apostles. The whole thing would be ridiculous, if it were not for the disaster he is calling down upon our whole people. The mobs are wild about him."

"Yes, that reminds me, that we forgot to mention to you, fathers of Israel, that the whole episode started with some of our own elders going up to beg him to heal this slave. It is a holy shame to see how some of our own leaders are being led astray. These elders came with a silly story about

how good and generous this centurion had been to our people, helping us build the synagogue."

"It is true that he did, though."

"Well, but to think that they thought him worthy of help because he had done us a favor."

"Really, the centurion showed much better sense than our elders. At least, he insisted that he was unworthy."

"Quite so, unworthy indeed! It is written, 'Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord pursuing them.' "

"It is also written, 'O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God.' "

"And then to have this Nazarene come with his 'I tell you.' Who does he think he is?"

"I don't know, but it is clear that he is leading our people astray. Let his kingdom come and there will be a people of God, no more."

To this prophecy they all chorused their enthusiastic Amens.

A few days later as the Nazarene and his disciples left Capernaum, the people of Main Street lined the walls of their houses and shops to pay their respect. The Master and his companions had become a part of the town picture. The common people, the tradesmen, tax-collectors and the sinners loved and honored him. The stirring enthusiasm of their first encounter, some seven or eight months before, had simmered down to the steady admiration of a general acceptance. They had come to look upon him as one of their very own and they were proud of having him making their town the general headquarters of his miraculous mission.

His presence had given a refreshing spirit of moral uplift to the life of their city. This was particularly true along the wharfs and the waterfront, where he had won many of his most ardent friends. The good citizens, led by patriotic Pharisees, did not seem to be much impressed by his teachings of repentance, but then those people were already pious and respectable and they needed perhaps no radical improvement. It was a different story with the publicans and the sinners for the presence of the Teacher had certainly meant a great deal to many of them.

Their town had but few really wealthy people and there was nothing to show that he had made any lasting impression upon them. A few of their number had been healed together with the countless other people who had taken advantage of his miraculous powers. For a short while the healed ones and their families had appeared where the Nazarene was preaching but the rich had soon disappeared, retiring to the absorbing and closed life of the well-to-do in their villas, apart from the common people of Main Street.

Among the latter he was still extremely popular, even though quite a few had become disappointed with his handling of his potentially great movement. To such people, the Master never seemed to get started on the task of consolidating his following into the great popular movement which they all felt was needed, if his powers were to become of real significance to the destiny of their nation.

He seemed to lack any gift for true leadership. The Zealots, who were the nationalist leaders of their city, appeared to be right, when they kept pointing out how inept he was in political acumen and planning. The Nazarene had by now been seen and heard by most Galileans and everywhere

there had been the same initial flood of popular enthusiasm, but then he had simply walked away from his success, eager to get to the next village. Such behavior was both irrational and frustrating.

The Zealots had held more than one conference with him and his disciples, trying to get them to see that they were scattering their efforts by trooping around the country, teaching and healing, when they should be concentrating on building a strong organization. With tens of thousands of men and women fired into intense and self-sacrificial enthusiasm, the Zealots argued that the Nazarene could become the head of the greatest movement which Israel had experienced since the days of the Macabeans. In truth, he might even become a latter-day Moses. Their country needed a latter-day Moses. Their country needed a deliverer and since the Almighty had endowed him with such extraordinary powers of miraculous action it was simply his duty to go on to greater things.

As soon as it had become clear to the Zealots that the new prophet was nothing but a religious fanatic, teaching a strange gospel of peace and non-resistance, they had written him off as a spiritualist, who did not understand the logic of politics and power. They felt sorry for him and for their people, because he undoubtedly had extraordinary powers and could have meant much to the righteous cause of Israel. When they saw the huge, ever-changing crowds following him they shook their heads and wondered how long this mass-deception could last. They thought that he was playing a very dangerous game, raising the emotions of the people to a fever pitch and leading them nowhere.

As the Nazarene and his apostles left through the city

gate on their new journey to the uplands south of Capernaum, some Zealots stood in huddled discussion in the town square. Their eyes followed the prophet and his friends as they disappeared toward the south. It was a pity that he did not understand his own potential power.

They smiled as they discovered that some Pharisees had also been watching the departure of Jesus and the crowd. The faces of the Pharisees were white with silent anger.

Such behavior the Zealots thought ridiculous. There was really nothing to be angry about. A prophet who kept on throwing away his chances was rather to be pitied.

The next day, the Master and the crowd following him were making their way up the hillside road on the slopes of Mt. Little Hermon. Just as they entered the little village of Nain, a funeral procession appeared at the city gate. In a moment the two crowds met and Jesus and his followers came to a reverent standstill.

The funeral procession was headed by four bearers, who carried the bier with the body of a young man, his body shrouded except for the face, which lay waxen and ugly in the setting afternoon sun. Directly behind the bier walked a lonely, grief-stricken woman, weeping. A widow, she was following her only son to the grave. The whole village was in the procession.

With sudden determination, the Master approached the stretcher and with a look of boundless love and compassion he greeted the widow.

"Weep not."

He touched the bier, asking the bearers to halt, as he lifted his face to heaven.

Coming close to the dead body he uttered a clear com-

mand that echoed across the two crowds and out over the green hills.

"Young man, I say to you, Arise!"

And the dead man sat up, and began to speak.

"Mother!"

"Son, son!"

The Master of life and death gave the son to his mother.

An agony of holy fear descended upon all. They had been in the presence of a Reality that had power to conquer even death. The awe which had momentarily seized them all changed now into a frenzy of grateful shouts.

"A great prophet has arisen among us!"

"God has visited his people!"

With many cries, tears and hosannahs they glorified God till the whole hillside was alive with echoes of their jubilation.

The report of this absolute miracle conquered the whole land and his fame became nation-wide.

Late that evening, when the lights had gone out in Nain, John, the Apostle, walked quietly away from the village into the hills. At length he seated himself on a huge stone and was lost in deep meditation. Myriads of stars sang in the Galilean night.

He sensed that the world would never forget Nain, where their Lord and Master had spoken the Word, which crushed the grip of Death. To the apostle, all this had become personal in the highest sense. Since Adam, death had ruled the world. But today, in this village, a Word had been spoken which had conquered that power. John wondered whether the people really understood. He sensed that this was what

the Lord meant, when he had told them they would see heaven open over the Son of man. Today the Master had fulfilled what he had tried to make Nicodemus understand about an everlasting life in God's love. And John recalled that the Book said, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

Today he had seen the Creator at work.

As the apostle walked quietly down the slope, he passed the cemetery. There he stood still for a long, long, time.

8. New Horizons

WHEN THE report of the miracle at Nain reached the capital, the Pharisees of Jerusalem acted with panicky speed. They realized that the Nazarene was fast becoming the absolute leader of their nation, as all regions were boiling in religious tumult at the news from Galilee.

The Jerusalem rulers had breathed a sigh of relief, when Antipas had thrown the obnoxious Baptist into prison. But later reports from the north had made clear to Jerusalem that the Herodians were not going to lift a finger to stop this new plague, the rebel of Nazareth. And stopped he must be.

Thus the Pharisees counselled together and decided that some of the keenest of their own men be rushed to Capernaum with full authority to publicly attack the Nazarene, in an attempt to undermine his influence among the cursed and stupid crowds, ignorant of the law.

When Jesus and the Twelve, therefore, returned home to Capernaum, the Pharisees from Jerusalem had already arrived. They had conferred with the local Pharisees and

scribes. Together they had agreed to challenge the Nazarene publicly at the first opportunity.

One day a blind and dumb demoniac was brought to the Master for healing. The unique case caused a multitude to appear. The Pharisees from Jerusalem stood watching with narrow eyes. The moment the healing was completed, the amazed crowd broke into a messianic question and cried, "Can this be the Son of David?"

Then the Pharisees struck.

"This fellow does not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils."

The crowds, who had followed the Master for weeks, were stunned and speechless at this obvious blasphemy.

Immediately Jesus turned to the Jerusalem agents and commanded them to come closer. Then, facing them with a burning look of holy anger he began to challenge them in the presence of the confused, horrified crowd.

"How can Satan cast out Satan?"

The agents kept silent.

"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?"

The Pharisees were white with rage, as they listened to the searing logic of the speaker's statement. It heightened their hate, too, when they felt that the Nazarene was re-establishing his authority over the silent but alert crowd.

"If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man?"

The people understood and remembered, as they nodded in enchanted agreement.

"Wherefore, I say to you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."

It was obvious to every listener that the fearless Master had not only stood up against the blasphemy of the Jerusalem agents but had driven them into the judgment of God. The dramatic encounter ended with a devastating cry from the Master, which reminded his apostles of John, the prophet of the wilderness.

"O generation of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

Then he left them, followed only by the Twelve.

Another day, when he was teaching, the Pharisees and scribes came back to harass him. Their defeat had only caused the crowds to increase but they lingered on in Capernaum since they did not dare to return to their Jerusalem superiors with a negative and dismal report.

They hated this unauthorized fanatic and they agreed among themselves that one way of defeating him and weaning the people away from him might be by challenging his authority. After all, the people of Israel was a people of the Law and they might, perchance, be brought back to their senses if they could be made to understand that this man,

unlearned and self-appointed, had no authority to teach in Israel.

"Master, we would see a sign from you," they tempted him.

The flaming answer was immediate:

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, but there shall no sign be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Every listener stood dumb with perplexity. Since he spoke of the Son of man, most of them grasped that he was speaking of himself, but not one among them understood what he was saying.

"The men of Nineveh shall arise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here."

"The queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Then, looking around at them all, he ended with a sharp challenge.

"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters!"

As he ended his talk, the multitude went into a frenzy of wild discussion. Everywhere exclamations rent the air with the rapid cries of frantic and confused people:

"He has gone insane."

"He still is the Son of God."

"The Devil has taken him."

"He raises the dead!"

"He heals all diseases and he loves our people."

"He blasphemes!"

"And he is greater than Solomon?"

"Can this be the Messiah, the Son of David?"

"He has worked too hard."

"He is mad as a demoniac, himself."

"And he calls us evil!"

"And now he wants to be a Jonah!"

Everybody talked to everybody in a sea of gesticulations and noise, hissing, admiring, jeering, defending, confessing, mocking and blessing. When the tumult lessened, they discovered that the Master had walked away.

During the next few days, Galilee was filled with violent rumors that the new prophet had lost his mind. The sad news reached even the village of Nazareth and his kinsmen.

One day as he was gathered with the Twelve in Peter's house, the crowd kept assembling, until the place in front of the house was packed with people, some ready to defend him, others curious to see him who had healed countless sufferers but now was stricken himself. Friends were trying in vain to disperse the crowd and went around with sympathetic whispers, "He is beside himself. Why don't you leave him alone?"

Suddenly the crowd turned as the word was passed along that his own mother and his kinsmen had come from Nazareth and wanted to see him.

They saw the men from Nazareth and the mother of the prophet standing at the end of the narrow street. They looked forlorn and helpless, like peasants in a strange and unfriendly town. It was obvious that the huge crowd frightened them.

The prophet's mother was a gracious, middle-aged woman, clad in the simple dress village women wore on the Sabbath. Her deep and thoughtful eyes were fixed on the open door where her son was standing. With the tender and abiding love of a mother, she had followed her kin on foot the weary miles from Nazareth to Capernaum. The alarming rumors that her son was sick and mocked in a faraway town had driven her to go to help and protect him. It had been a long and anxious walk and her heart had relived the memories of years gone and past . . . the death of Joseph . . . the agony of that Passover when she had lost her son in the crowds and searched for him for days, until they found him in the Temple at Jerusalem in discussion with the priests . . . the horrible flight with him to Egypt . . . the unforgettable days of happy wonder in the stable at Bethlehem . . . the angelic story of the shepherds . . . the adoration of the babe by the wise men from a far-off eastern land.

Her simple face filled with saintly wonder as she gazed at the crowd, and she recalled once again the most sacred of all the days in her strange and blessed life, the day of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel had visited her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you: blessed are you among women." She had become greatly troubled at this greeting, wondering what kind of saying it was. She had never forgotten the angelic answer.

"Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS."

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob

forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Mother Mary looked up to discover a commotion at the door of Peter's house, as one of her kinsmen from Nazareth was making his way back through the crowd.

"Did you talk with him?"

"Yes, I did."

"What did he say?"

"He stretched out his hand toward his disciples around him and said, 'Behold my mother and my brothers! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.'—That was all. Do you want to see him?"

Mother Mary's face brightened in a peaceful smile as she answered, "No, and now let us return home."

The disciples were amazed that their Master could take the insulting attacks of the Pharisees without any sign of bitterness or revenge. He continued to preach wherever people gathered and his lovingkindness to children and the afflicted knew no faltering nor limit. There was a positiveness in all that he said and did. Mild and yet unsentimental, he walked among the crowds and with his chosen men.

Among themselves the apostles agreed that it had been divinely necessary for him to be harshly truthful with the blaspheming Pharisees, who had attacked him and his good works by the outrageous accusation that he was doing Satan's bidding, when all could see that God was at work. They were glad to see that the insidious attacks of the Pharisees had not affected the loving admiration in which he was held by honest Galileans.

They had observed, of course, that there were some who had drifted away and had returned to their old ways and worldly bondage, either because they had become impatient with the Master's severe demands or were disappointed in his slow way of organizing his movement. Among themselves, the apostles often admitted that, at times, they themselves were confused and troubled. It was not that they doubted him or wondered whether he really had an over-all plan for his work, but they felt that with hundreds of thousands of Galileans ready to support him, things seemed to wait for some divine directive for their Lord to follow. The many times he went out alone to pray were moments when he was seeking the will of the Most Holy, but their faith in him made it impossible for them to ask questions when he returned from his prayers. The assurance that he knew their thoughts, however, was enough for them.

One day as he was teaching, his disciples noticed that their Master used nothing but parables when he spoke about the Kingdom of Heaven. They listened and wondered.

"Listen! A sower went out to sow. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they had not much earth, and immediately they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun rose, they were scorched, and because they had not root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But other seeds fell into good ground and brought forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some a hundredfold. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Some people remarked that he was speaking in riddles. Some thought that the story was good to listen to, even though they admitted that they could not see what he was driving at.

He continued to speak in parables about the Kingdom of Heaven. He said it was like a man scattering seed upon the ground and the seed sprouted, grew and, at length, gave a harvest of ripe grain. Or, the Kingdom of Heaven was like a grain of mustard seed, the smallest seed of all, and yet it grew into a tree so that the birds of the air could make nests in its branches.

When he ended his teaching for the day, the people were fascinated but bewildered. Some thought that they liked his former sermons better, when he had spoken directly without any riddles. This new way of teaching was really more difficult to follow.

That afternoon, as he was gathered with the Twelve, the talk turned to his new way of teaching.

"Lord, why do you speak to them in parables?"

"Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to them it is not given."

"Lord, give us the meaning of the parable of the Sower."

"Do you not understand that parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"

He could read in their worried faces that they felt humiliated at their own ignorance. His face brightened into a patient smile when he saw how eager they were to be taught.

"The sower sows the word."

They nodded their heads as grateful smiles filled their faces.

"And these are the ones by the wayside, where the word is sown; when they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are the ones likewise who are sown upon stony ground, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time; afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And these are they who are sown among thorns; they hear the word, but the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, enter in, choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But these are they who are sown upon the good soil: they hear the word and receive it and bear fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold."

The transparent clarity of his explanations filled the disciples' minds with an inner light. They knew now who the sower was and they understood what had happened repeatedly this year while they had followed him through Galilee.

Suddenly the Master surprised them with an abrupt order.

"Let us cross over to the other side of the lake."

They all arose and entered the boats, as the setting sun shone in a dying glow on the steep mountains on the east side of the lake.

As they set sail, the tired Master went astern, laid down and was soon asleep.

Suddenly a fierce western wind swept down from the highlands and drove the calm sea into an almost instantaneous fury of raging waves, beating against the boats, filling them to the point of danger. The fishermen-apostles had seen it happen a thousand times before and they suddenly recalled nights when they had barely made land.

They rushed to awake the Master with cries of near panic.

"Master, Master, we are perishing."

Awakened, he looked at the raging sea, then at his apostles.

"Why are you so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?"

Then he cried into the storm:

"Peace, be still!"

The wind abated, the waves died away, and there was a great calm.

In the sudden stillness, a sense of fear and awe gripped the apostles. They said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

In the early morning, as their boats were nearing the shores of the crystal blue, calm lake, they saw a crowd of people along the fishermen's dock. Some were busy with selling and shipping freshly-caught fish, but most of them had come to wait for him and the twelve men.

As he stepped ashore there was a stir of happy excitement, but suddenly the crowd parted, making way for Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue. The people followed him with annoyed stares as he hurried by. Were the Pharisees out again to harrass the prophet, as they had done on so many previous occasions?

However, as Jairus reached the Master, he fell to his knees. Looking into the prophet's expressive face he implored him to come and help.

"My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be healed, and live."

Immediately the Master helped him up and they began to walk together, the apostles making way for them through the multitude. At the corner of the street leading to Jairus' house, they were met by messengers from the ruler's house, their faces sad and dejected.

"Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Master any further?"

Ignoring the message, Jesus turned to the speechless ruler with a confident word that restored his hope.

"Be not afraid, only believe!"

In the spacious courtyard, the company of official mourners had already intoned the shrill, wailing lamentation for the dead. The heart-breaking din of flutes and the loud cries of the paid mourners filled the courtyard and re-echoed along the streets of the neighborhood.

Suddenly the Master began to clear the courtyard, demanding that the dinning noise be stopped at once.

In the hush the followed, they could hear his clear and confident voice ring out over the empty courtyard.

"The child is not dead but sleeping."

Instantly a roar of raucous, mocking laughter rent the silence.

Disregarding the crowd, the Master with Peter, James and John, walked quietly with the ruler through the open door to meet the weeping mother of the dead child, a twelve-year-old daughter.

The door closed.

Treading with a physician's noiseless, confident step into the room where the child was, the Master approached the girl and took her by the hand.

"Talitha cumi!"

At his greeting the little girl stirred, rose up and walked.

As the parents and the three apostles looked awe-stricken at the strange scene, the Master ordered the parents to give their daughter something to eat.

He charged the five eyewitnesses to keep this to themselves as a sacred trust. By evening, however, the whole town knew that the ruler's daughter was alive. Somebody had seen the happy smile on her father's face.

The following Sabbath the synagogue was filled to overflowing with worshippers who listened to the prophet with amazement and disturbed thoughts. As he finished his teachings, the synagogue resounded with comments from every side.

"Where did this man get all this?"

"What is the wisdom given to him?"

"What mighty works are wrought by his hands!"

"Is not this the carpenter?"

Jesus rose from his teacher's chair and marveling at their unbelief, he beckoned for silence.

"A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and in his own house."

Disregarding the tumult and the testy tones of the offended audience, he walked out of the synagogue.

The crowd did not realize that today they had heard his last sermon in their synagogue.

One day the Master received a strange message from a Pharisee named Simon, who invited the famous prophet to dine with him. The invitation was immediately accepted.

When the strange guest entered the Pharisee's house he found himself face to face with a nervous and self-conscious host, who looked as if he had permitted himself to get into a situation with which he did not know how to cope. He was fully aware of the growing animosity of the leaders of his own party toward this strange, unorthodox teacher. For a moment he regretted his rashness in inviting the Nazarene, and he received him with an awkward formality, leaving out the customary kiss of welcome.

The guest was escorted into the luxurious dining room. As they reclined on the couches around the table, the host had to admit that only the dignified courtesy of the stranger in his house had saved the situation. The natural friendliness of the Nazarene infected all present, including the important host, a leading and honored citizen of the town.

Presently, however, the Pharisee froze with insult and incredulity. His narrow eyes started at a notorious woman of the town standing behind the prophet's couch. Unnoticed, she must have stolen in through the open door and upon finding him whom she was seeking, she proceeded to break open an alabaster flask of ointment she had brought.

Presently a deep sob surged through the room as the woman, tears streaming down her face, leaned over the Master's feet. She unloosened her hair and dried his feet, and emptied the precious contents of the alabaster flask over them, the sweet fragrance floating across the table.

Jesus turned and greeted her with a grateful smile. He perceived a heart which had heard the glad news that there was forgiveness of sins and salvation for sinners. Having believed the Gospel, her heart's gratitude had prompted her to pay homage to him who had made her a new person. Hope and love shone from her face.

In the meantime, the host, Simon the Pharisee, had made his own observations. Biting his lips in disgusted humiliation, he kept telling himself that the action of this obvious harlot proved that his guest was not a genuine prophet.

"If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner," his thoughts hammered in his mind.

"Simon, I have something to say to you."

"Rabbi, what is it?"

"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred *denarii,* and the other fifty."

Simon nodded politely.

"When they could not pay, he frankly forgave them both. Now tell me which of them will love him most?"

The answer came with hesitant caution, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave most."

Pointing to the woman kneeling at his feet, the Master spoke in a clear voice to the host across the table.

"Do you see this woman? I entered into your house; you

gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair."

"You gave me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss my feet, since I came in."

"You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with ointment."

The prophet's blunt frankness made Simon feel as if his own room had been turned into a chilly court of justice. He kept his embittered silence.

"Therefore I say to you: her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

In the nocturnal stillness that followed, the Master turned to the woman.

"Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Almost a year had passed since John the Baptist had been transferred to the dungeon of the Machaerus bastion, located in the wild and barren mountains of Moab. Herod Antipas, having developed a modicum of decency, had ordered that the religious fanatic be treated with respect and given a certain amount of freedom of movement within the walled fortress.

The fiery and visionary prophet of the wilderness had found the months long and tantalizing. Whenever his disciples or some of the soldiers came to visit with him he had only one thought in his hungry mind. He wanted to know in as much detail as possible how the Galilean mission of the Nazarene was being received by the people and government. He invariably called the prophet "the Son of God" and he never tired of witnessing to those around him that he, John, knew by divine assurance that it was the Messiah himself who was now at work in Galilee, ushering in the Kingdom of Heaven. John's own faithful disciples believed him, but the pagan soldiers and the Greek traders discounted this part of the Baptist's talk as an expression of excessive imagination. New and strange stories about the Nazarene's power of healing and preaching were brought to him whenever some of his friends had been up north and had heard the latest news concerning this overwhelming new prophet. Some said he was Moses, others that he was Elijah, while others insisted that he was "the Son of man," whom the visions of Daniel, the prophet, had foretold and who would come in the latter days upon the skies of heaven to rule the new world.

The Baptist, pondering the wonderful reports brought to him, would sit by the heavy wall of the fortress, looking with a lost gaze at the river Jordan, winding its green way down

to the sulphurous mists of the Dead Sea. His lonely young heart would fill with speechless sadness as he sat frustrated, longing to be with him in Galilee.

Since there had been no direct word from the Master himself to John the Baptist, the prisoner had often wondered if the Master had forgotten him. Most of John's own disciples had, long since, gone over to Jesus, leaving the Baptist with only a little group of close friends, who from time to time would challenge the dangerous road and the killing heat of the desert to visit him. On those invigorating occasions the Baptist would never cease glorifying his successor as the true meaning of his own mission.

At length, however, his young heart broke. Loneliness and love threw his soul into black despair. He had to know. Thus he begged two of his closest disciples to travel north to Galilee and to bring back the personal answer from the Son of God.

"Go, tell him that I sent you. And this is the question you must ask of him, 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?' " His voice was breaking with the agony of a man whose life depended upon the answer.

Descending the shadeless cliffs of the Moab ridge, John's disciples made their toilsome way across the desert plain into the green valley of the Jordan, where they spent the night near the old baptismal place of their leader. They reminded one another of the many frightening events since those sacred days, when all Jerusalem had come out to hear John, the prophet of the wilderness. Now he was the prisoner of the adulterous Herod Antipas and Jerusalem had gone to sleep again in its sinful pride, as if John the Baptist had never spoken his stern words of repentance.

Exhausted and weary from their hurried journey, John's messengers reached Capernaum on the third day and made immediate inquiries as to the whereabouts of the Master. They were told that he was teaching in the uplands southwest of the city. After further inquiries in the villages along the road they found him surrounded by an immense crowd from all over Galilee. In that hour he was curing many afflicted with diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and to many who were blind he bestowed sight.

Driven by the urgency of their mission, John's disciples immediately made their way through the milling crowd to where the Master stood.

"John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you he who should come, or shall we look for another?' "

Andrew and John, standing close by, were astonished at the strange question from the prisoner in Machaerus. They instantly recalled the scene on that day, so strangely far away, when John's own word. "Behold the Lamb of God," had persuaded them to take the first steps on a glorious journey which had lasted until this very moment. Could it be . . . ?

Before they could continue the trend of questioning thought, the compassionate voice of the Master spoke the answer.

"Go and tell John what you see and hear: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And—blessed is he who shall not be offended in me."

For a brief moment, John's messengers stood gazing at the scene before them. Then they turned to the Master and

said, "Peace," whereupon they hastily departed with the Master's "Peace" ringing in their ears. Having received the answer for the prisoner in Machaerus, they hastened their steps eager for the return trip.

The Master's eyes followed them as they walked down the hill. His cousin John, the Baptist, would understand that the answer indicated a direct fulfillment of the hopes which the prophet Isaiah had given God's faithful concerning the days of the Messianic kingdom. Today it was here and John's own disciples had seen it at work among men. Now they were on their way with the good news.

At length, the Master turned, as if he suddenly had rediscovered the intense crowd about him. Then he opened his mouth and spoke of John:

"What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind?"

"What then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?"

"Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' courts."

"What then did you go out to see?"

"A prophet?"

"Yes, I say unto you, and more than a prophet!"

The thought-provoking rain of questions had captured the attention of all his listeners, giving them a keen sense of the significance of what he was about to proclaim.

"This is he of whom it is written,

'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,
Who shall prepare thy way before thee.'

"Verily, I say to you: among those born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist; yet he that is

least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he."

The faces of men and women, standing shoulder to shoulder, reflected wonder, mystery and solemnity.

"From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to receive it: He is Elijah who is to come!"

With that last, mysterious pronouncement the Master suddenly left with his apostles.

Departing down the hill, they observed that the stunned listeners huddled together were trying to help one another to unriddle the strange message they had just heard.

As it turned out, there were many among them who had personally met John the Baptist and had been baptized by him, repenting and confessing their sins.

To them the stark clarity of the Master's words about John came as a relief and a confirmation. Until now many of them had lived in a tension between two loyalties. They were John's disciples and they were following Jesus, but the tumultuous events of the last months had made them uncertain and cautious. They had often asked themselves, if John was the Elijah, how could Herod Antipas have power to hold him prisoner? And if John was only a messenger but not the promised Elijah, how could they really know who this Nazarene was?

They recalled how they had heard John the Baptist testify about this new prophet, that he ranked before him, because he was before him, and that he had his winnowing fork in his hand to clear his threshing floor.

Time and again they had discussed among themselves

the exact words which John, their leader, had uttered, but they had only become more confused, because there were so many things that were strangely different about this new prophet, Jesus of Nazareth. They had been waiting for him to become filled with the holy fire and fury of their leader John. They had expected him to burst forth with the glory of God's anointed, to proclaim himself king and recapture the Holy City, to fill the land with unconquerable, heavenly peace and subdue the world with divine power in earth-shaking events.

Instead they had heard him proclaim glad tidings, calling sinners and tax-collectors, accepting them without any baptismal rite of repentance; blessing children, defending the defenseless, and saying that the meek and non-resisting shall inherit the earth. All this had confused them and made them cautious, but it had not prevented them from following him. They had marveled and rejoiced at every poor man, woman or child who had been healed and helped. Above all, they worshipped the new Teacher for the incredible love and patience which he showed toward all who sought him.

Today he had spoken clearly. He was the Messiah and he had released them from their shortsighted unbelief. Today, he had made everything clear for them, head and heart. Since John was the Elijah, Jesus was the Messiah of God.

Tomorrow they would seek out the Master to confess their new faith and ask his forgiveness for the sinful blindness that had kept them half-hearted and cautious.

One early morning the Twelve Apostles were sitting in the cool breeze singing through the green hills. They were awaiting the return of the Master, who had left them to pray alone. As on so many previous mornings the thoughts of the apostles again turned to the unknown world of prayer. They had long since realized that this was the secret of their Master's life. But he had never introduced them to the power and the peace which they had felt must come to those who really know the mysterious secret.

Waiting for him to return they began to talk of the prayers they had been taught in school and synagogue and of people whom they had observed at prayer.

Some of them had been to Roman cities along the coast of the Great Sea and to the pagan Caesarea Philippi. There they had heard violent and weird prayers before false gods of stone. They recalled how their Jewish hearts had recoiled at the sight of that noisome exercise and how they had felt pity with people who did not know the one true God.

After that the conversation drifted to the scribes and the Pharisees, the praying men of their own religion. Until they had begun to follow the Master the apostles had always been impressed by the Pharisees who would stop to pray in the most unlikely places proving to the people what holy men they were. Now, however, after months with the Master they had ceased to admire these praying leaders of religion with their fast mumbling of many long prayers so utterly different from the spirit of the Master.

As the Twelve Apostles talked together a humiliating sense of helplessness fell upon them as it always did when their conversation touched upon such high and deep spiritual matters. They all knew that a kind of new spiritual earnest-

ness had come to them, since the Master had come into their lives. They seemed to get more out of their personal evening prayers which they had learned as children. And yet, whenever they thought of the Master and his life of prayer they sat lost like little children longing before the locked door of a great feast.

Suddenly they saw him coming down the hill, his face shining with peace and powerful determination.

"Peace."

"Peace," they answered in unison.

Then one of them asked the question they had been longing to ask for months.

"Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

Inviting them to sit down in the grass, the Master began his quiet talk on prayer.

"When you pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not like them, for your Father knows what you have need of before you ask him."

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Verily, I say to you, they have already received their reward."

"But you, when you pray, enter your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly."

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it will be opened unto you. For every one who

asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened."

"When you pray, say:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done, on earth
As it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors;

And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

The stillness of Eternity filled the disciples' hearts and made their every-day faces shine with the transfigured glory of men who had received the keys to the kingdom. This morning hour was the greatest and deepest moment they had shared with him ever since leaving their boats along the sea.

Today he had led them into the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven itself. There their spirits found a clarity and a peace beyond anything that had ever entered into their most hopeful imaginations.

That evening, as each man prayed the prayer which he had taught them, they again felt like children, but they were no longer lost. They had a Father in Heaven and a Brother on earth.

9. Days of Decision

ONE OF THE feasts of the Jews was drawing close and the Nazarene decided to go to Jerusalem. He had not visited the national capital since the Passover of the year before when he had startled the Temple rulers by cleaning the court of the Gentiles of the bazaar-like mess of commercialism and noises which had been permitted to desecrate the Temple grounds.

Now he approached the Holy City of Israel as one of the worshippers lost in the pilgrim caravans. But he carried with him the story of a great popular success, which, as he knew, had been reported by unfriendly spies to the Jerusalem rulers. He recalled the tens of thousands of simple Galileans to whom he had preached the glad tidings of the kingdom. He could still hear the din of the ovations they had given him in town, village and countryside. He also remembered the thousands of afflicted he had healed and how soon most of them seemed to forget both their benefactor and the kingdom.

As he walked the pilgrimage miles, he thought deeply of the rising opposition of the scribes and the Pharisees, and

the hatred which had driven them even to blasphemous statements about the works of the Almighty. The empty ovations of the masses, the ingratitude of the healed ones, the violent opposition of the leaders of the people—these were burdens he carried on his heart as he mingled with the boisterous and thoughtless pilgrims.

His clear mind looked back on the work in Galilee and he rejoiced in the spirit over the faithfulness of God, who had given him the unbroken, simple loyalty of the chosen Twelve and countless other followers, who had accepted the glad tidings: the quiet people, the outcasts, the tax-collectors, the sinners and those devout men and women who awaited the redemption of Israel. He felt keenly that his Galilee had now been split in two, for wherever the Word had been preached, a new and separate Israel of God had been born, a people that would never die.

Arriving at the top of the hill where Jerusalem with its Temple, walls and houses could be seen, he rested and gazed at the city of God, which was also the city of David, of Solomon, of Jeremiah and the prophets, of the Maccabeans and the Pharisees. Inwardly he knew that it was also the city of his own destiny. With calm determination he rose and walked into the feast of the noisy city.

On the days of the feast he participated in the religious services in the Temple, standing in the court of the men, gazing up toward the Holiest of the Holy. His devotion was undisturbed by anyone who might know him from Galilee. Neither did he teach nor preach.

On the Sabbath of the feast he came into Bethzatha, the place of public misery near the sheep gate, and walked slowly among the multitude of chronically ill, in this sanc-

tuary of last resort, where mineral waters at times had a healing effect. The five porticoes around the pool were filled with invalids, blind, lame and paralyzed, all begging and wailing.

The unknown Nazarene stopped before an old, decrepit man who must have been lying there for a long, long time. Fixing his eyes upon the sick man, the Master asked him a question.

"Do you want to be healed?"

"Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool, when the water is troubled, and while I am coming another steps down before me . . ."

The man's voice reflected years of hopeless frustration.

"Rise, take up your bed, and walk!"

At once the man was healed and he took up his pallet and walked away from the portico. As he turned into the adjoining street, however, he was stopped by the Sabbath police.

"It is the Sabbath. It is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

"But he who healed me said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.' I have been sick for thirty-eight years."

"And who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?"

"I don't know. The first time I ever saw him was today in Bethzatha."

Scolding him for breaking the Sabbath regulations, they ordered him to leave his worn pallet up against a wall and return for it after sunset.

When the healed man had made his way through the

crowded city to the Temple, the Nazarene again approached him quietly giving him a stern personal warning.

"See, you are healed! Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall you."

Later the healed man, accompanied by Temple watchmen, came back and pointed out the Nazarene as the one who had healed him. Immediately the guards turned to the Master and said, "It is unlawful to heal on the Sabbath." They spoke in a brusque and threatening voice.

The Master looked them in the eye and with a royal calm in his voice, he gave them a cryptic answer, which they did not at all understand.

"My Father is working still, and I work."

Before the Sabbath ended, he was engaged in private conversation with some of the scribes and Pharisees. More out of curiosity than of ill will they had taken the opportunity to get him aside in order to take his measure in the kind of disputatious debate of which they were past masters.

Most of them had long since become bored with the noisy feast with its endless rituals and its ignorant crowd. Their favorite intellectual pastime was that of getting involved in neat, subtle and highly technical disputations on fine points of the application of the Law. In a lifetime of studies and highly sophisticated mutual debate, they had become experts in logic-chopping, fast turning questionings and hair-splitting definitions. Such disputatious sessions had much finesse but they had lost their contact, if they ever had any, with life or true religiosity. The religious intellectuals seemed to think that the simpler things of piety and worship were matters for ignorant and devout people who still insisted on taking religion as a personal matter. This unedu-

cated approach was apparently favored even by this new Teacher, whose activities in Galilee had been described as a combination of a peasant revolt and miracle madness.

Politely they invited the young Nazarene to be seated in their midst. Their sharp minds were about to take him on a dialectical excursion to a logical defeat, when the prophet of Nazareth suddenly shattered all their plans by a solemn declaration which mystified them all.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but only what he sees the Father do; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise."

The fixed and frozen faces of his scholastic listeners showed that they liked neither the mysterious words nor the overwhelming spiritual strength of the person who had spoken them. They had been ready to swoop down on him only to find that they had lost both their dialectical skill and the control of the situation. He spoke a religious language which they had never heard before. And his undisturbed manners forced them to admit to themselves that he was a man of sovereign fearlessness.

Sitting back as obedient pupils before a master teacher they became the subdued listeners to the strangest argument they had ever heard. He captivated them and as his teaching calmly progressed with logical clarity from point to point they came to realize that they were confronted with a dialectical genius of spiritual force.

The prophet of Nazareth told them that the Father would lead him into greater works than any they had as yet seen or heard of in his ministry about which they might well marvel.

He revealed to his silent listeners that the hour was

coming and was now at hand when the dead would hear the voice of God and those who heard would live.

He linked the resurrection of the dead and their judgment to himself and warned them to pay heed to his call.

"Verily, verily, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has everlasting life; and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

The Pharisees and the scribes listened with increasing awe. They marveled at such stupendous sayings made in a calm and quiet voice by a prophet who was definitely conscious of his mission. His manner was restrained. They could think of no questions to ask.

The Master continued the exposition of his basic teaching by informing the captivated audience of the ultimate authority upon which his teaching rested.

"I can of my own self do nothing; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father who has sent me."

Next he upbraided the learned listeners for their failure to grasp the true meaning of the message and mission of John the Baptist.

"You sent to John, and he bore witness to the truth . . . He was a burning and shining light, and you were willing for a while to rejoice in his light."

At that point all thoughts of the men in the audience momentarily drifted to the famous prophet of the wilderness, who was now being kept prisoner in the mountains of Moab. The next moment they were stunned and stung by a direct challenge from the Nazarene.

"But I have greater testimony than that of John; for the works which the Father has given me to finish, these very works which I am doing, bear witness of me that the Father has sent me."

"You search the scriptures, for you think that in them you have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me. But you will not come to me that you may have life."

At length some of the learned listeners seemed to recover their sense of importance. They assured themselves that men such as they, who had Moses for their supreme authority, did not have to accept the authority with which this new prophet clothed himself. They were just building up courage to raise objections, when the Master answered their question before it was spoken. This time his voice was sharp.

"Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one who accuses you, even Moses in whom you trust. For had you believed Moses, you would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how shall you believe my words?"

With that question he rose and departed. He was satisfied that the leaders of the Temple now had received first hand instruction, giving them a clear, personal knowledge of him and what the Father had sent him to accomplish, that God's will would be done on earth, beginning with Jerusalem.

When he left, they arose and looked at one another with mutual amazement. The silence lingered for a while, before they attempted to put into words what they had experienced. They agreed that he had come to the feast for the definite purpose of meeting them and they felt a strange fear chill their hearts with what they had just heard and seen. This

prophet of Nazareth actually held that his divine authority exceeded that of Moses and that the Holy Scriptures of Israel were written about himself. The maddening thing was that they had not been able to detect the slightest trace of madness in him when he proceeded to develop in a scholarly and calm way his mission and his faith.

They shuddered.

As he walked down the hill path toward Nazareth he rested under some poplars and gazed over this landscape which he had viewed a thousand times from his childhood days until the day he went to be baptized by John in the river Jordan. He recalled the names of the owners of the olive groves and the fig orchards. He remembered days and years of childhood play and adolescent work, the chopping of trees, the hauling of timber, the customers who came to Joseph's carpenter shop, the simple and independent people of the surrounding region. He turned to look at Mt. Carmel and thought of the first Elijah and of the second Elijah, John, who was now imprisoned for telling an adulterous ruler the truth. This was his Galilee. His own name would always be Jesus of Nazareth.

He rose and walked slowly into the setting sun, descending to his home town, and passing the town well he greeted his former neighbors as he walked toward the house of Mary, his widowed mother.

Instantly the word passed through the whole village, "He is home again."

The citizens received the news with mixed feelings and no one rushed to Mary's house to welcome the man who after all had disappointed their village by leaving them in order to make Capernaum his new home town. For months they had been cool to the fantastic reports of his work in the rest of Galilee and as if by silent agreement the citizens of Nazareth had chosen to boycott him and to minimize his fame. If their town was not good enough for him to have it share his fame and glory, they were not going to be dragged away to Capernaum and there perhaps be insulted with questions about why he had left their Nazareth.

This evening of his sudden home-coming, months of bitterness welled up in the hearts of his disappointed fellow-townsmen, as they talked long into the night about him who might have made their own town famous throughout the whole land of Israel.

"I wonder why he came back at all."

"Oh, he probably would like to see his mother again and visit with his kin. Even a prophet has some human feelings."

"I pity his mother. She has certainly had her share of grief."

"Indeed, but she still loves him and believes in him."

"I think she is a saint. I wonder how many mothers would forgive a son who would treat them as he did her, when his kinfolks went to see him in Capernaum, and he merely said that he had a new family now."

"And what a family—some rough fishermen, a couple of publicans and some other sinners!"

"He must have changed much since he left Nazareth. You remember how kind and considerate he always used to be? The mothers in town used to point to him as an example for their own youth. I wonder whether the scribes may be right in saying that a demon has taken hold of him."

"God forbid! Watch your tongue! He still is a good man or else the people would not love him so much. And there has never been a prophet in Israel who has healed as many as he has done."

"Quite so, and in Nain over the hill he even raised a young man from the dead and gave him back to his mother."

"I think that we should not judge him too severely. Per-

haps he has come back to stay here to to shower glory on the name of Nazareth."

"I beg to differ. I heard Jude, the carpenter, this afternoon telling the people in his shop that he had seen him in the feast at Jerusalem this week. I am sure that his ambition is leading him on to transfer his miracle-work to Jerusalem itself."

"They certainly need some miracles down there, the way our rulers are falling down before the Romans."

"You may be right at that, for if he really is the Messiah, as all Galileans seem to think, then the Scriptures say that he must appear in the Holy City of King David."

"Tomorrow is the Sabbath and I am sure he will be called upon to speak in the synagogue and I am certain that he will redeem himself."

"He had better!"

As the Sabbath services began, the Nazareth synagogue was filled to overflowing, and many who could not get in were milling about in front of the open door. The prophet had arrived early to the sacred building where he in early years had been instructed in Moses and the prophets, in Israel's rich history and in the traditions of the elders.

As the worshippers had expected, the ruler of the synagogue invited the famous guest to read the text assigned for the day. He stood up and read the prophet Isaiah:

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Even as he was closing the scroll, giving it back to the attendant and sitting down to teach, the audience marvelled at perceiving how perfectly this Isaiah prophecy seemed to fit the work which their own fellow citizen had been doing throughout Galilee. With a keen sense of expectancy, all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him.

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears."

The listeners turned to one another and nodded with a smile of agreement.

Explaining the text he showed that it was a prophecy of the Kingdom of Heaven which had now arrived on earth. He spoke of the dungeon of sins and of release through forgiveness from on high. He told them of the love of God who had remembered his people of Israel with salvation and hope. He announced that the kingdom was like a man making a great wedding feast for his son and inviting many.

As he continued his teaching they relaxed and felt as though they were already sitting at the wedding table of God's love. They had never heard anything like this before and they were amazed at his gracious words. A soft and happy murmur of surprised satisfaction went through the audience, whenever he said something they liked particularly well. Now they understood why people called his message the glad tidings and why all Galilee had come to love him.

Suddenly an irreverent voice spoke a question.

"Is not this Joseph's son?"

They were all embarrassed to hear someone speak out loudly what they had been thinking to themselves.

Looking at them with a calm, friendly smile, he spoke

with a frank directness as if he had heard what they had talked about in the privacy of their homes the night before.

"You will surely say to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself;' what we have heard you did in Capernaum, do here also in your own neighborhood."

At the mention of Capernaum the audience stiffened in self defense. Their attitude froze into a hardness which had not been there when he preached the glad tidings. They hated to realize that he knew exactly what the whole village had been saying.

His gracious smile changed into a solemn expression. This the apostles knew always came whenever he was about to stress truths that people did not like to hear.

"Verily, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But, I tell you of a truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when a great famine came throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent, except to Zarephath, a town in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow."

"And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, except Naaman the Syrian."

His insulting words sent a flood of wild and angry thoughts through their aroused minds: heaven shut up . . . a great famine . . . Sidon and Syria, the cursed heathens . . . lepers, lepers, so that's what he thinks Nazareth is full of!

Instantly the audience was changed into a mob filled with fury and wrath. They rose up, drove him from their synagogue and pursued him with mocking and jibes out of the city. Some local brutes seized him and leading him to

the brow of the hill on which their city was built, they threatened to throw him down headlong.

At the top of the hill, he suddenly stopped and surveying them with a royal, penetrating candor, he made them freeze in their tracks. They had never experienced anything like that before. It seemed as if the trump of judgment day had sounded over their little city. It was frightening beyond words, for he had not uttered a single word.

Passing through the midst of them he went away.

A short time after his return to Capernaum, he took his apostles apart from the multitude and began to speak to them of the next step in his kingdom mission. They sensed that a heightened sense of urgency had come over him, as he confided in them that time was short and that the great task was not nearly accomplished. He needed their help in a much more direct way than had so far been possible. Until now, they had followed him and been of comfort and service to him. He reminded them of how he called each of them by name and had ordained them to be his apostles. With a sudden turn from the past to the future, he surprised them by announcing that he would now send them out, two and two, to be his heralds and delegates among the Galilean people.

At this news they were highly pleased. Eager enthusiasm was reflected in their young faces as he commissioned them, giving them power and authority, in his name, to preach and to cure.

A surge of anticipation went through their hearts at his gracious promise to make use of them in this new way, assuring them that they would always find his authority and power commensurate to their every need. They had not dreamed that this day of special service would come so soon, neither had they ever thought that the Master would show them so great a confidence as to entrust them with his own power and authority. They were close to tears as they looked at him and at one another.

They had often seen messengers from the august Sanhedrin traveling through this region, two and two, and they seemed vaguely to realize that they were now to become spokesmen of a kingdom greater than the Temple.

The rest of the day of the new commission the Master spent in giving them accurate and detailed orders as to what they should preach and how they should travel.

He charged them to carry no bag, no bread, no gold, no silver, no copper. They should have only one tunic, but go forth in heavy sandals, fit for the many miles of roads ahead. They should have a staff like those which shepherds carried.

He charged them to avoid the Gentiles and the Samaritans, since their mission was to go to the lost sheep of Israel. They should travel to the far-off villages where the message had never been heard. He wanted all Galilee covered with the glad tidings.

Without provisions for the journey, they were to depend upon God's providence. They were heralds of the kingdom and entitled to food and lodging. They were not beggars. Whenever they entered a village, they should seek out a devout and friendly family, which might extend hospitality.

Greeting the host with "Peace" from their Master, they should remain in the same house, sharing whatever simple food it offered, until their departure.

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me."

Like soldiers, they should concentrate solely on their mission. They should not stop on the road to engage in lengthy and time-consuming conversations. There was no time to waste.

They might well run into fierce opposition, but that should not surprise them or diminish their courage.

"The disciple is not above his master, nor a servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call those of his household?"

The apostles nodded in warm agreement. More than ever did they feel proud to be of his household. His words steeled their wills and warmed their hearts.

He charged them to meet any animosity in a spirit of loving kindness and without any harsh words. If they were driven out of a village, they should simply make a symbolic gesture of taking off their sandals and shake off the dust of the unfriendly village.

Again and again he reminded them of what they should preach. They should cry to the people everywhere, that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand and that repentance was needed and called for. They were not to say anything about the Messiah, nor divulge secrets he had told them in his private instructions since they became his apostles. But, wherever they found faith, they had his power to heal the sick.

Overwhelmed with exalted happiness, the apostles departed with his "Peace" ringing in their souls. To think that they had been chosen by him to be the first heralders of the kingdom!

The Galilean spring day shone brightly over the green hills as twelve young men disappeared, two and two, down the road.

Rejected in Galilee

10. Crisis in Capernaum

LATE ONE evening some of John's disciples arrived and asked to see the Master immediately. They were led into the dimly lit room and he saw that they were filled with fear and sadness. Their clothes were dusty from a long, forced march.

John the Baptist was dead.

Herod Antipas had ordered him beheaded during his anniversary feast in the palace at Machaerus.

The Master fell silent, shaken by the news of the martyrdom of his cousin. Quietly he asked the messengers to be seated and to tell the full story.

King Herod had arrived at the fortress, surrounded by his courtiers, officers and leading men of Galilee. The visitors brought their wives and concubines, flocking around the adultress Herodias and her daughter Salome.

One night Herod was giving a great banquet in the palace while the ladies of the courtiers gathered in the women's quarters. After hour-long feasting and drinking Herodias' daughter had come to the royal banquet hall to perform some of the decadent dances she had learned in Rome.

As she finished dancing, there was raw laughter and heavy applause from the drunken guests and the king was very much pleased. In front of the guests a shocking conversation had taken place between him and the dancer.

"Ask for whatever you wish and I will grant it."

"You are teasing me."

"On my oath, whatever you ask for I will give you."

With that promise dangling before her lust-filled eyes, Salome had rushed to the women's quarters to ask her mother Herodias for advice. Presently she had come running back with great haste.

"I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

Her screaming, murderous demand wrought violent confusion among the drunk men and they saw the king's face turn ashen-grey and sober. It was obvious that the king was shocked and exceedingly troubled, but regaining his power of speech, he ordered a soldier of the guard to fetch the Baptist's head. The soldier had gone at once and had beheaded John.

The dancing girl received the gruesome gift without any show of regret. As the soldiers and the courtiers looked aghast she carried the dripping head as in triumph to her mother Herodias who received it with gleeful revenge.

The Master remained silent when John's disciples finished their tragic report. He recalled the multitudes which had met him beyond the Jordan when John had preached repentance and baptized. He thought of the last message he had received from his cousin a few weeks previously and of how the messengers had hurried back with his answer.

Then he quietly invited John's men to stay with him

until his apostles would return from their mission throughout Galilee.

The next few weeks all of Galilee was astir with the rapidly growing new movement of the Nazarene. The word spread that he had sent his twelve apostles out with power to preach and to heal. From every corner of the province came strange and happy reports of the miraculous deeds these men performed in their Master's name.

The people were amazed. Their own old devout men assured them that never, in all the miraculous history of Israel, had anything like this ever happened. Admittedly, there had been prophets among them ever since the mighty days of Moses, but never had God given His power and glory to a band of men such as those who were now working throughout Galilee.

Everywhere the common people received the messengers with joy and saw many of their sick healed. From time to time they heard rumors that the Pharisees did not like this new movement, but the men and women of the villages agreed that the petty jealousy of the scribes and of the Pharisees would never be able to stem the wave of joy and acclaim with which the Master and his men were surrounded.

In fact, the tide of enthusiasm had put new hope even into the Zealot circles, which detected the beginnings of a sweeping national rebellion. If God could give this power to his chosen people, who were the Romans to withstand them? In feverish planning the Zealots dreamed of days of deliverance mightier than those of Joshua and Gideon. So certain had they become of the success of the rising forces of a new day that they went around publicly proclaiming that the Messi-

anic salvation of their downtrodden people was near. Now they understood what the quiet and strong Nazarene had meant when he said that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand and that he had been sent to proclaim release to the captives.

The Zealots had thrown their early doubts and misgivings to the winds. Now they were certain that this was indeed the acceptable year of the Lord with liberty for their oppressed people.

The sudden upsurge of a popular movement among the Galileans was reported to Herod Antipas. The ruler seemed, however, at a loss what to do about it. Rumors were abroad to the effect that the murderous king's mind had become dark and sick ever since the gruesome moment when the head of John had been brought to him on a platter. He kept talking about the beheaded prophet and his intimates had heard him cursing his evil wife for what she had made him do. His servants spread abroad that the king's mind was haunted by guilt. He had seen the ghost of the beheaded prophet at night.

Upon his return from the macabre feast at Machaerus, Antipas had grown increasingly worried over the fame of this new prophet called Jesus of Nazareth. With the fear of a panic-stricken man he would tell his servants, "This is John the Baptist, who has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him." When some of the courtiers had sought to reassure him by trying to make him understand that the new religious leader actually was but another prophet, like the ones who had appeared many times before among this strange Jewish people, Antipas had just repeated, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

One day he called one of his captains and said, "John I beheaded; but who is this Jesus about whom I hear such

things?" Realizing how anxious and restless the tetrarch had become since the murder at Machaerus, the soldier suggested that Antipas send an invitation to the new prophet who by the last report was at home in Capernaum.

Antipas sat quiet for a moment in fear and curiosity, trying to decide whether it would be a wise thing to come face to face with a prophet who might be the man he beheaded. At length he ordered the soldier to fetch the Nazarene.

When the tetrarch's delegates arrived at Capernaum with the royal invitation they sought out some Pharisees in an effort to locate the new prophet. The Pharisees remembered the beheading of John. They loathed the thought that another of the men of their Israel should meet a similar fate at the hand of the treacherous ruler. Thus, even though they hated the rebellious Nazarene, they sent one of their own group to warn the prophet of the ominous arrival of Antipas' soldiers, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

"Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform healings today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall finish my course. Nevertheless, I must walk today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem."

The Master's impertinent answer mystified and angered the messenger of the Pharisees. The prophet seemed to have the same searing contempt for the pagan ruler in Tiberias as for the Great Sanhedrin in the Holy City. His haughty attitude would certainly be reported to Jerusalem in a week or two at the Passover.

At that moment a great crowd was turning the corner of the street leading to the fishing wharf south of Peter's house.

Approaching the humble house they saw the Master standing in the door.

As the jubilant, singing multitude drew closer, he discovered the twelve apostles approaching. They were returning from their mission. Their clothes were dusty, their sandals worn, but they beamed with a triumphant smile. It had been a victorious experience. The weeks had gone by in a perpetual ecstasy. In the crowd were many people from the distant villages who had insisted on following the apostles home to Capernaum to see and hear their famous Master.

He welcomed his apostles, and excusing himself from the crowds, closed the door to be alone with them as they made their joyful and startling reports of what they had done and taught.

The Master listened to them with calm, intense alertness. He invited them to come away with him to some secluded place, where they could contemplate what had taken place and get rest for their tired bodies.

As they opened the door, the packed crowd was amazed to see the Master, followed by the Twelve, walk away through the multitude down to the boats. Rowing off shore they set sail and steered to the northeast, in the direction, as it seemed, of the lonely green plain near Bethsaida-Julia on the other side of the lake.

A few hours later, as their boats came near the landing at Bethsaida, the apostles were keenly disappointed at discovering the shore packed with thousands of people, obviously waiting for the Master's arrival.

As he went ashore, his face full of compassion, the Master beckoned the multitude to follow him to the lush, green fields to the east. The crowd was made up of men, women and chil-

dren from Capernaum and the villages north along the lake, including Bethsaida-Julia. The apostles discovered many of the new friends whom they had gained during the recent weeks. In the multitude there were also some Passover pilgrims from the region of Gaulanitis, who had decided to stop to see and to hear the prophet of Nazareth.

When, at length, the eager thousands had come to rest in the grass, the Master began to teach them. He spoke to them in many parables, all concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. Whenever he came to a brief halt in his teaching, someone would bring forward a sick or mentally afflicted person. He healed them all.

Then he would continue his teaching, thus pointing out to his listeners that both healing and teaching were revelations of God's love and God's power. Sitting on a little hill, young and erect, he marveled at the spiritual hunger he saw written in the thousands of eyes gazing at him. He taught with a deep compassion in his voice.

"Behold the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they?"

"And why are you anxious about raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I say unto you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

"Therefore take no thought for your life, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' nor for your body, 'What shall we wear?' for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

The deep, soothing feeling of a carefree peace filled the listeners as he spoke. Never before had they heard words like these and their hearts rejoiced in silent awe.

As the afternoon sun was sinking toward the western mountains, his apostles came to him, a worried look on their faces.

"Master, the hour is late now. The day is now over."

"And this is a lonely place."

"You had better send the crowds away."

"Yes, let them go into the country and the villages round about to buy themselves something to eat."

He listened patiently to their suggestions; then he turned to the apostle Philip, who was in charge of the provisions.

"They need not go away. You give them something to eat."

Philip looked bewildered and sought for an answer.

"Shall we go and buy two hundred *denarii* worth of bread and give them to eat?"

A smile of loving-kindness rested on the Master's countenance as he heard Philip's willingness to spend all the money they had in their treasury to feed the multitude. Presently he asked how many loaves of bread they had available.

They went away to find out and soon Andrew came back accompanied by a boy, who had come out with the idea of earning a few pennies by selling a little food among the crowd.

"Lord, there is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?"

"Bring them here to me. And make the people sit down."

The apostles passed through the crowd inviting them all to get seated in groups as ordered by the Master. A strange

expectation filled the men, the women and the hungry children.

The whole crowd watched in reverent silence as the Master took the five loaves and the two fishes into his hands. Looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke them, giving them to the disciples to distribute.

All ate and were satisfied.

After the meal he commanded the twelve apostles to gather up what was left over. Each apostle returned with his basket full of remnants of food. In all, five thousand men aside from the women and children had eaten.

Glad cries of Hosannahs went up from the satisfied and surprised crowd. They all praised him.

"This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"

"He is the Son of David!"

"He is the deliverer of Israel!"

"This is the Kingdom of Heaven!"

Perceiving that the uncontrolled multitude was about to come and take him by force to make him king, the Master immediately ordered his apostles back to their boats, as he himself withdrew, alone, to the hills toward the north.

The stunned crowd watched him walk away.

He saw that neither the apostles nor the people had fathomed the symbolic and true meaning of the divine banquet, which his heavenly Father had blessed and spread before their eyes. Tomorrow he would explain it to them.

He remained in prayerful and personal communion with the Father throughout the star-filled April night, until the fourth watch.

Returning to his apostles, he found them having difficulty

maneuvering the boat on the lake, for the wind was against them. But when they saw him walking toward them on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out for they were terrified. Presently they heard his strong voice across the turbulent waters.

"It is I, have no fear!"

As he got into the boat with them, the wind ceased and they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. They looked at him and then their eyes sought the baskets filled with bread in the prow of the boat.

As dawn was breaking, they moored the boat at Gennesaret, two miles south of Capernaum. They got out of the boat and began walking along the shore. Immediately the people recognized him. Running about the whole neighborhood to tell of his arrival, they began to assemble, bringing with them bedridden sick on their pallets.

This repeated itself all along their march toward Capernaum. Wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country, the crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, placing them at his feet, and he healed them. The throng marveled when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they glorified the God of Israel.

The next few days Capernaum was filled with excited, worshipping crowds, with frantic conferences among the Pharisees, and a phenomenal growth in the number of people who called themselves his disciples.

The Zealots held nocturnal meetings discussing how they

could force him into political action, for now the time was ripe for ushering in the new kingdom with its liberation of Israel.

As tens of thousands joined the triumphant march through the southern Galilean countryside, in full view of Antipas' Tiberias, the whole region became alive with skyrocketing Messianic hopes. His apostles as well as the wider circle of disciples felt that this overwhelming popularity of their Master was now so strong that it must indeed lead to a day of decision.

The Master himself went amidst this sea of milling, admiring crowds, silently keeping his own counsel. He realized that not even his apostles had grasped that his whole mission was in danger of being swallowed up by a misplaced popular enthusiasm.

He himself knew what had to be done, and as they approached Capernaum he abruptly stopped the pressing and screaming multitude. He challenged their earthly dreams with an unexpected sternness in his commanding voice.

"Verily, verily, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw miracles, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."

There was an immediate reaction of murmured dissatisfaction.

"Labor not for the food which perishes, but for that food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal."

"Master, what shall we do that we might do the works of God?"

"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

A wave of poorly hidden resentment greeted his words. Some of the bolder listeners threw a counterchallenge at him.

"Then what sign do you show us, that we may see, and believe you?"

Peter and the other apostles turned white with anger at the people's frightful unbelief. After a thousand signs, they mused, this miracle-mad crowd wanted still more proofs, before they were ready to believe him.

The spokesmen for the crowd, thinking that they were driving the Nazarene to the defensive, continued with unabated impertinence, "Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' "

With calm majesty, the Master accepted this challenge, which was obviously meant to belittle the feeding which had taken place in the wilderness before their very eyes as compared with the manna which God had given their forefathers through Moses in the Sinai desert.

"Verily, verily, I say to you, Moses did not give you that bread from heaven; but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world."

A storm of enthusiastic shouts of "Lord! Lord!" went up from the crowd, as they begged, "Lord, give us this bread always! Always!"

When at length the wild tumult died down, he continued in a strong voice with emphasis on every word.

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes on me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe."

No vocal answer came from anyone in the crowd to this

flaming challenge from the Master, but the multitude broke into countless murmuring groups, all disgusted and angry at this blasphemy.

"Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"

"How is it that he says, 'I have come down from heaven?' "

"And what does he mean by calling himself 'the bread of life?' "

There was a chaos of murmur and hissing, until he again spoke.

"Do not murmur among yourselves. No man can come to me except the Father who has sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."

The multitude listened in restless silence, aghast at a mortal man standing before them, calmly committing the blasphemy of saying that he, a man from a little, detested village, is going to continue his work until the Judgment Day, and that he has the resurrection power of the Holy One. In their shocked and frightened hearts they knew, that if someone would have courage enough to obey the law of Moses and throw the first stone at this mad blasphemer, they would all join in, stoning him to death in the name of the God of Israel.

"Verily, verily, I say to you, he who believes on me has everlasting life."

"I am the bread of life."

"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. And the bread which I shall give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

The Lord beckoned to his apostles and walked slowly

away from the crowd. Entering Capernaum, they were welcomed by Peter's mother-in-law, Mary Magdalene and other women who served him.

The following day as he walked with his apostles to the Sabbath service, he knew that the whole town had been thrown into violent disputations by his challenge to them to believe in him. He kept the holy secret to himself that the true meaning of his feeding of the multitude, his blessing and breaking of the bread, would not become clear even to his apostles until a much later time.

As they entered the synagogue, he heard people in heated discussions asking one another, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

When he was asked to teach the Sabbath worshippers, he knew that the invitation was given in malice by the rulers of the synagogue, who felt certain that today they had victory over him within their immediate grasp. Skilled informers had assured them that the prophet from Nazareth had yesterday actually managed to turn the incredible enthusiasm of the multitudes occasioned by the meal at Bethsaida-Julia into a violent anger by saying about himself that he was the bread of life from heaven.

He had overreached himself.

The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon him, as they noticed that today he did not ask for the holy scroll, but began to teach them immediately.

"Verily, verily, I say to you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."

Many of the listeners looked around the holy place of God, as if they expected an angel of the Lord to come to destroy this outrageous blasphemer. In timorous awe they wondered why the rulers permitted this sacrilege in God's house. The worshippers did not know that the scribes and the Pharisees had secretly agreed that they would permit him to blaspheme freely so that they might have public evidence with which death accusations could be pressed against him.

"As the living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father, so he who eats me, even he shall live by me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers ate manna and died; he who eats this bread shall live forever."

As the Lord finished his teaching, the Pharisees rushed out of the synagogue to a prearranged council meeting. The crowd, indignant with hatred, stared at him, but let him pass by out of the sacred place which he had so grievously desecrated.

As he lingered outside, he noticed that many of the people who had followed him for some time, and who had loved to call themselves his disciples, gathered in debating groups, protesting, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

Followed by the Twelve, the Master walked quietly over to these disgruntled disciples, as the curious crowd closed in to watch him and to hear what he would say to his own previous followers.

"Does this offend you? What then if you shall see the Son of man ascending up where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you, they are spirit and they are life. But there are some of you that do not believe."

Some of his disciples nodded their heads in embarrassed agreement, but many of them realized that today they and he had come to the parting of their ways. They were utterly mystified at his strange talk. In fact, they were afraid of what might happen to him after this day. Deaf to his words, they began to drift away, their heads bowed in silent frustration.

At length he beckoned the Twelve to follow him and as the crowds made room for them he walked slowly down the street to Peter's house.

When they were safely indoors and alone, he looked from one to another of his Twelve and asked them frankly, "Will you also go away?"

They looked lost, turning one to another. This had been the most painful day of their lives. They had seen how their Lord, willingly and with full intention, had decided to press the people for a decision. To the apostles it seemed as if today he had set himself to destroy the great results of his whole mission.

Impulsively Peter moved forward "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we believe, and are sure, that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

As Peter's trembling voice ceased the confession, they all looked at the Master's face. It seemed troubled and had a far-away look.

"Have I not chosen you, the Twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

The rest of the Sabbath, the apostles sat huddled indoors in a frightened silence. With sadness they recalled the marvelous, hopeful weeks which they had just experienced as his

messengers. They recalled how they had filled the twelve baskets after the feeding of the thousands.

And then, today? They were crushed in a vise of speechless fear.

That night sleep came late to Judas, the apostle from Kerioth. His feverish mind and his uneasy conscience were locked in an inner struggle. The words of the Lord kept haunting him deep into the night. If Peter's words were true, then how could the Son of the living God let every opportunity pass him by to come forward and forge the immense Galilean masses into an army of the Most High? Why did he seem eager now to destroy the Kingdom cause he confessed to have come to build? Had the Eternal One given him this frightening divine power only to see how his messenger doodled away his mission of liberation? His own people of Nazareth had threatened his very life and now he had alienated all of Capernaum.

Judas lay tossing under the relentless hammering of a bottomless sense of frustration. His Master had stilled the wind and the sea; he had overpowered demons and raised the dead. And, yet, would he have the power to stem the fury of the masses when they realized that this Son of God had cheated them of the glory of an independent Israel?

All the other apostles were Galileans. Why had the evil befallen him to have been chosen among the Twelve?

II. The Struggle Sharpens

THE LOCAL Pharisees and scribes were quick to sense that the prophet from Nazareth had managed to alienate many of his admirers, even including some who had followed him loyally for many months. The ignorant mob, which did not know the law and the prophets, was still for the most part blind to his treacherous character. They were too ignorant to understand that this healer was an enemy of their people. In fact, the mob would probably keep shouting Hosannahs at him, until he destroyed himself or until he forced the Romans to take punitive action against all of Israel.

By now the liaison between the Pharisees at Capernaum and the rulers at the Temple of Jerusalem had been organized into a well-coordinated action of spying, reporting and counterattacks. The helpless intervention, which the Capernaum leaders had begun in the early days of the Nazarene's ministry, had now been replaced by a well-planned, sustained program of counterattack, led by emissaries from Jerusalem. The Jerusalem spies dogged his every step, reporting his actions and pronouncements.

The plan of the Pharisees was aimed at protecting the law and the traditions of the elders in order to keep intact the national opposition of Israel to the occupying power, until that great day, when the Almighty One would drive the Romans out of their holy land, as He had done with the Assyrians of old. With a fervent hope in the coming divine intervention, they dedicated themselves to keep their people undefiled by the heathen, preserving the nation proudly united behind Moses, the Temple, and the tradition of the elders.

Day by day, week after week, they had watched with growing anxiety and bitter indignation this new John the Baptist, the prophet of Nazareth, storming ahead with tens of thousands of men and women flocking to him and his treacherous tidings. Also, they had found it suspicious that neither Antipas nor the Romans had seen fit to arrest him and his mad followers. The patriotic Pharisees kept telling themselves that the Nazarene might well be a tool of the occupying forces used for the purpose of destroying the morale and national resistance of their demilitarized nation.

After a full year of his activities, he had them perplexed and utterly afraid.

They had searched through the records of the history of Israel for an answer, only to agree between themselves that such a movement as his had never before appeared among God's people. He was not a political leader, or else he would long ago have gathered his thousands and raised a rebellion against Rome. Instead he kept on teaching a silly doctrine of nonresistance, promising his captivated followers that love and nonviolence would conquer the whole wide world. In

fact, it was a matter of record, that he had cried out that the meek should inherit the earth.

On the other side, he was not a true Israelite. On the contrary, every new week proved that he was really full of guile. He never tired of using his powers of healing to fascinate the masses, telling them that this was a proof of his divine authority and of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. The dumb multitudes believed him, since he always sounded sincere. In fact, the masses thought that he loved them.

Resentfully, the scribes and the Pharisees admitted among themselves that they had never been able to stir any such love for themselves among their people, and this fact made them realize what a gigantic task they had trying to wean the multitudes away from him. Whenever they discussed this side of their counterattack, the Pharisees shook their heads in frustration, but they swore by Him, who liveth and reigneth, that they would remain faithful to God and His people of Israel. If they did not succeed in turning the love of the common people toward themselves, at least they resolved to do their utmost to drive a wedge of suspicion between the Nazarene and the tens of thousands, whom he had managed to catch in his net. No wonder, they protested, that this treacherous teacher was called the friend of sinners and had ordained stupid fishermen to be his "fishers of men."

During recent weeks, the Pharisees had viewed with increasing alarm how his twelve so-called apostles had been sent out throughout Galilee and Perea to fan the fires of the miracle-mad enthusiasm for the Nazarene. Rumors had it that he had secretly authorized these uneducated men to teach and to heal in his name. All reports indicated that the Twelve had met with considerable success even in the remotest vil-

lages of the region. In fact, the spiritual center of popular attention had suddenly begun to move from Jerusalem to Capernaum, where the prophet was making his home with a fisherman called Peter.

The leaders of the Pharisees in Jerusalem had been deeply disturbed at the reports of how the new prophet had ordained twelve men to be his delegates. They took counsel together and agreed that this latest move by the Nazarene was aimed at making clear to all that he now had set his mind to establish a new Israel, different from the one which had come down from the patriarch Jacob, his twelve sons and their twelve tribes. Their scribes had warned the Jerusalem leaders that the so-called glad tidings now being preached by the Galilean were a clear departure from the traditions of the elders by which Israel had been kept victorious and intact until now, in spite of all the pagan pressure and the vicious heathen religions.

It was, therefore, with hope and joy that the Jerusalem rulers received the good news of the most recent developments in Capernaum. A better day seemed in the making with the people breaking away from his mad leadership. Of particular significance was the news that many of the devout had found his blasphemy too much to take.

Since the multitudes, at length, were beginning to come to their senses, the Jerusalem leaders decided that this was the opportune time for launching a frontal attack upon the prophet's law-wrecking gospel, which permitted his followers to break the Sabbath regulations, to eat with the excommunicated and to disregard kosher rules.

One day, while the people of Capernaum were still perplexed at the Master's word about himself being the bread of

life, skilled emissaries from Jerusalem struck at him, in the name of all which was holy in their ancient doctrine.

He was teaching the multitudes when the emissaries, marching up to him in a body, stopped him with a brusque question.

"Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat. Why do they not live according to the traditions of the elders?"

The tone of their voices was harsh and demanding, as of men who knew they were divinely right in demanding an answer. The crowds moved closer, ready to enjoy an impending battle of wits. Many times previously they had been present when local Pharisees had made their feeble attempts at harrassing the Nazarene. Each time the masses had smiled with gleeful relief at hearing how their hero drove his adversaries into another dismal defeat. Today they stood in intense silence watching the unperturbed prophet surrounded by the Jerusalem emissaries.

"And why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"

As the Pharisees and the multitude stared at the prophet with surprised and nonunderstanding eyes, he continued in a clear, calm voice:

"God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'He who curses father and mother, let him surely die.' But you say, 'Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, 'What you should have received from me has been given 'Corban,' given to God,' he does not need to honor his father."

There was much nodding of heads among the crowd, as they whispered to one another personal incidents, which proved that the prophet was absolutely right. Many listeners

had experienced how their own children had been forced to give gifts to the Pharisees and the Sadduccees, when they might instead well have helped their parents living in the dire poverty.

Looking sternly at the Pharisees the prophet added with a voice of warm conviction:

"Thus you have made the word of God of no effect by your tradition. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you:

> 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; but in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the regulations of men.' "

The Jerusalem emissaries looked at him without a show of emotion. Theirs was a mission of fact-finding and fault-finding, and they congratulated themselves in having succeeded in forcing this lawless rebel to admit that his movement did not intend to obey the rules which the tradition of the elders had laid down for Israel. As experts of the law in its manifold ramifications, the Jerusalem delegates could now bring home firsthand evidence which proved beyond a shadow of doubt that this Nazarene was out to break down the tradition of the elders.

They would further report that he had invented a tricky theological method by which he set the law of Moses against the Mosaic regulations of the elders, and that he persisted in quoting the prophets to suit his own lawless interpretations.

Suddenly they were thrown out of their mental self-congratulations by a loud proclamation from the prophet to the milling, debating multitude.

"Hear me, all of you, and understand: Not that which

goes into the mouth can defile him; but the things which come out of the mouth defiles a man."

With that pronouncement he began to walk away with the Twelve. The listeners realized that, once again, the Master had turned the tables on the defenders of tradition. He actually intended to reject all the precepts of the Pharisees and the countless regulations which they had imposed upon Israel.

The emissaries from Jerusalem, leaving the scene, agreed among themselves that today they had heard the prophet destroy all the meticulous regulations of purities, which their elders had worked out from the law of Moses. They knew now that this Nazarene would have to be excommunicated. In fact, the sayings of the elders clearly stated that he who neglected to wash his hands must be uprooted from the earth.

They would also report to their superiors in Jerusalem that the rebel from Nazareth actually had told these ignorant Galileans that only what comes out of a man's mouth can defile him. This outrageous new doctrine was a direct rejection of all the religious and hygienic rules, which he himself must know had been given Israel in the *Toharoth*, which taught purification of utensils, of hands and of tents, together with the regulations about baths, menstruation and plagues.

He was himself the greatest of all plagues, they agreed.

As soon as the Twelve had their Master well inside the privacy of four walls, they gathered around him to tell him what they had observed during the clash with the Jerusalem emissaries.

"Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"

He looked at them with a friendly smile at their eagerness as if they had just revealed to him an important secret.

"Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

They looked at their Lord with faces reflecting a mixture of consternation and admiration. Then Peter spoke for all of them. "Explain this parable to us."

"Are you also still without understanding?"

Their silence gave him an eloquent answer.

"Do you not yet understand that whatever enters into the mouth passes into the stomach, and so passes on? But these things which come out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, blasphemy. These are what defile a man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Their faces lit up with understanding. They felt that he had now revealed to them directly what the commandments of God really meant. He placed them in the heart of man. The apostles sensed that this made the commandments much clearer and also much more difficult to keep.

In the pre-dawn stillness of the next day, the Lord and the Twelve walked through the streets of Capernaum. On Main Street they turned north toward Chorazin. He had not yet told them where they were going, but they all understood

that he had chosen this early hour of departure in order finally to escape both from the crowds and from the wiles of the Pharisees.

In prayerful meditation he had surveyed their present situation and decided that his apostles, at length, should get the rest, which had so rudely been denied them during the tumultuous happenings of the last week. He could not proceed south to Judea, where he had recently met the animosity of the rulers. He could not go west, where he had experienced the rejection by his own Nazareth. He could not bid the Twelve to sail him across the Lake of Galilee to the eastern shores, where thousands of people certainly would repeat the surprise welcome for them which they had encountered a week ago.

He was leading his apostles out on a journey which he knew would disturb their narrow Jewish minds, but which promised them the privacy they had to have if he was to succeed in making them into his apostles and delegates in truth.

Once again he had praised his heavenly Father for the loyal hearts of these eleven young men. He was not alone. He knew that they would be his very own, as long as they should live. However, from the thousands of helpless questions which they had asked him over the last months, he also knew that, while they wanted to understand the things of the Kingdom of Heaven, they were yet like confused children.

Now when he had made clear to the rulers in Jerusalem that the Gospel was an utterly different and new world of the Spirit, it was imperative that his own apostles should

gain a spiritual understanding deep enough and clear enough to bind their hearts and minds to him, their Lord.

As the Galilean morning changed into the heat of noon, the apostles kept wondering aloud among themselves whether the Master was again taking them out on one of the overwhelmingly successful mission travels which had been their joy, ever since he first called them. They reassured one another that his own love and power would continue to hold the love and attention of his Galilean people, whatever Jerusalem and its Pharisees might say or do.

As their little company arrived at the highway, which skirted the northern end of the Lake of Galilee running westward to the Great Sea, the apostles were shocked to hear him announce that he was leading them west to Phoenicia, toward the region of Tyre and Sidon.

He sensed the Jewish misgivings and fears they harbored, at crossing into the land of a heathen nation. He set their disturbed minds at rest by explaining to them that this was not going to be a preaching mission with public teaching. This heathen region was, however, the only place in which they might find rest and undisturbed privacy. He had much to say to them and he had longed for this opportunity to be alone with them. Thus he warned them not to reveal their identity to anyone whom they might meet when they entered the alien land. The Twelve received his explanations with relief and glad anticipation. They assured him that he could trust them.

With that agreement, they crossed the border. Suddenly they all experienced that strange and tugging feeling, which comes to a person the first time he departs from his own land, leaving his own people behind.

There followed days and weeks in Phoenicia with a fellowship which the Twelve would always remember. Away from the noise of the masses and spared the inquisitions of the scribes, the Master made full use of every day in guiding his chosen ones into the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Beginning from Moses and the prophets, he explained to them, with care and clarity, the true meaning of the message of the scriptures. Slowly their dull, earthbound spirits began to see glimpses of the divine purpose of all the great and strange things which God had done for their people of Israel ever since the day when Abraham left his land and his kinsmen in Ur of the Chaldeans.

Day after day, the Lord gave them instruction with a patience which they could not cease to admire, as they kept asking him the thousands of unanswered questions which had come to their young minds during the busy year they had followed him. Questions which had been left buried and postponed because of the endless activities of teaching, healing and counselling which had filled their Master's days in Galilee.

Now they began to tell one another how little they really had understood the happenings of the last year. They had lived in a world of wonder and ignorant amazement, which had dazzled their minds into fancying that their Lord had conquered his Galileans, hastening the day of Messianic glory when they would march together with him at the head of God's victory parade.

Sooner or later this would happen, of course, but here in the Phoenician retreat the Twelve suddenly realized that their Lord was not fully satisfied with the mass movement which had been created in Galilee. He was apparently

hoping for something more, something different from mere popular acclaim. He kept impressing upon the Twelve that his kingdom was out to win the hearts of men, that the kingdom was a thing of the spirit. Try as they might, the apostles did not quite understand what he meant. They sensed the restless patience of their Master as he tried to make them see these difficult things. Yet, even though they gave him their undivided attention through the long and arduous sessions of instruction, he was not succeeding too well in making them grasp what to him was so transparently clear.

This inability to follow the Lord, when he delved into the mysteries of the kingdom, left the Twelve humiliated at their own slowness of heart, but they refused to get discouraged, since he himself had promised them that it had been given unto them to know the mysteries of the kingdom. One day they would understand both him and his kingdom.

Many a weary evening they reminded themselves of his word:

"Blessed are the eyes, which see the things that you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen them, and to hear the things you hear, and did not hear them."

During the retreat in Phoenicia, the Lord conscientiously refrained from any preaching and he kept his companions from entering the pagan cities of Tyre and Sidon. They remained in the countryside. Often they would sit in the hills gazing out over the great, blue ocean, where ships came sailing in from Ephesus, Corinth and Syracuse. Each man sat with his own silent dreams. Whenever their eyes turned to their Master, they could see him absorbed in the beauty of the sight, as a meditative alertness filled his silent face.

One afternoon, as their little company was returning from the countryside to their village quarters, they were disturbed by hearing a woman crying loudly after them. They turned to discover that she was a Canaanite but her words revealed that somehow she had come to know their identity.

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. My daughter is severely possessed by a demon."

The Master did not halt. Nor did he answer her a single word.

As the woman refused to be ignored, she continued her screaming prayers for all to hear. The annoyed apostles, fearing that this might mean the breaking up of their retreat, hastened their steps to catch up with him, begging him to send her away.

As he was about to enter his dwelling place, the Master suddenly found the anxious mother kneeling before him, her eyes full of tears. He looked at her with compassion, but said:

"I was sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

"Lord, help me!"

"It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

"True, Lord, yet even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

"O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you will!"

The apostles could not help noticing the strange warmth in his voice.

As the joyous mother rose and ran home, the Twelve

instantly realized that their Master had kept faith with them by proclaiming that his mission was to Israel, but they also knew from countless blessed experiences over the last year, that their Master never closed his heart to a suffering heart which cried in faith for his merciful help.

Knowing that their presence in Phoenicia had been discovered, the Lord led his apostles by way of Sidon on the road east, walking south of Lebanon through the Decapolis region toward the Lake of Galilee. As he still had much more to teach the apostles, they made but short day marches and thus gained a few more weeks of quiet fellowship. They avoided the towns with their curious men and women, who had been watching for him ever since they heard that the prophet had trekked north after leaving Capernaum.

One day he was recognized as he was passing by a village. As soon as they saw him, they rushed to the village to find a man who needed help. It was a townsman who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. They led him to the famous Healer, begging him to lay his hand upon the deaf one.

As a crowd immediately gathered, the Lord took the deaf man with him and, having brought him aside from the multitude, he made deft, symbolic gestures to make the afflicted man understand what was about to take place. The Master put his fingers into the deaf ears, touched the man's tongue, and, looking up to heaven, he sighed:

"Ephphata. Be opened!"

Immediately the man's deaf ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. The Master charged him to tell no one, but when the healed man returned to the

crowd he could not hide what had happened to him. They were all astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

The news of his return to the region spread instantly through the countryside and in a few days there was again the familiar scene with thousands of eager and curious people surrounding him. Some of them came a long way. After three consecutive days of teaching, the Master fed the crowd in the same manner as he had done with the five thousand near Bethsaida-Julia. The following day his apostles manned a boat taking him south on the Lake of Galilee to the region of Magadan and Dalmanutha. On this voyage they passed by the city of Capernaum on their right as many thoughts filled the hearts of the apostles and their Master.

A few days after his arrival on the southern shore of the lake, the Lord was again accosted by his Jerusalem adversaries. This time the Pharisees arrived on the scene accompanied by their own arch-enemies, the Sadducees. Since the latter group represented the secular arm of the Jewish power in the Holy City, their presence could only mean that the nation's rulers had decided to cooperate in challenging the prophet with all the authority they could muster.

Together the representatives of the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to argue with the Nazarene, demanding to see a sign from heaven. If he were the Messiah, it was high time that he give unmistakable proof of his divine authority by calling into play the cosmic powers, which the true Messiah was expected to possess and put on display when he should arrive. Signs were to appear in the heavens themselves on the Day of the Holy One of Israel. If this Nazarene

failed to produce such a sign from heaven, all Israel would know that he was an imposter.

The Master listened to their impertinent and ironical demands.

A long period of silence separated him from his challengers. Then he sighed deeply in his spirit and gave them his commanding answer:

"Why does this generation seek a sign? When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather; for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' O you hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times!"

"Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation, but the sign of the prophet of Jonah!"

With this flaming negation he departed from them, walked down to the shore, and getting into the boat again, sailed away, the course set due north.

For the second time in a few weeks the Master again led his apostles across the Galilean border into pagan country. This time they escaped the masses by keeping to the open country, giving him a continuing opportunity to instruct and to encourage the twelve young men who followed him.

Leaving Galilee in the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, they entered into a lovely region of green fields and singing streams. As they reached the top of a hill, they suddenly found themselves face to face with the magnificent, regal picture of the new capital which the tetrarch had recently built in honor of Caesar Augustus. Named after the tetrarch himself, Philip, the city was called Caesarea Philippi. It was situated on a high rock, its marble whiteness

shining against the breathtaking grandeur of the snow-capped Mount Hermon. In the afternoon sun the impressive marble columns of the Augustus temple told the approaching travellers of a Roman empire which had set its cultural mark even on this region, so far removed from Rome, the center of imperial power.

The apostles stood in silent awe at the splendor before their eyes. Secretly they wondered what the glory of the kingdom of their Messiah would look like, when the hour of its fulfillment came. Also who would share in that glory to which Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Phoenicians, and other nations of the world would come to pay homage.

The secret travels of recent weeks had taken them to the Great Sea. Their eyes had seen the age-old highways, filled with memories of battles of many peoples and kings. They had been to alien shores and seen people who spoke in many different tongues. Their minds had filled with feverish imagination, as they privately talked together of the Kingdom of Heaven which would conquer all nations, filling the earth with the unspeakable glories of God.

The new world which so suddenly had burst in upon their minds had fascinated them to such a degree that they had begun to say among themselves that even the glorious year of their Master's mission in Galilee was but a feeble indication of what lay ahead. In a spirit of hilarious assurance, they dreamed together of the Day of Consummation, when their Lord suddenly would be enthroned above all the powers of the world and would go forth to change the earth into the everlasting paradise foretold by the seers of old.

This inner assurance of his rapidly approaching victory had taught the Twelve to smile at the childish opposition of

the scribes and the Pharisees, who were so blind to the signs of the times that they persisted in fighting for a lost cause. Every time these adversaries had come to accuse their Lord, he had defeated them, sweeping away their charges as one sweeps the chaff off a threshing floor. Even last week, down by Magadan, when the Pharisees had come, abetted by the feared Sadducees, they had been rebuked. How peevishly frustrated they had looked, when the Lord bluntly refused to give them a sign from heaven!

Over the recent weeks something had told the Twelve, walking apart and undisturbed with their Master in strange and alien regions, that he seemed to be getting ready for some great new event.

They were admiring the impressive city on the rock, Caesarea Philippi, when he called them.

"Who do the people say that the Son of man is?"

With bursting eagerness the apostles immediately started to give individual reports of what they had heard from the people in the cities, the villages and in the countryside.

"Some say John the Baptist."

"Some think you are Elijah."

"Some say Jeremiah."

"Some are sure you are one of the old prophets raised to life again."

The Master listened for a moment to the reporting of these contradictory opinions. Then he looked from one to the other.

"But who do you say that I am?"

This was the supreme moment for which they had been waiting.

They knew.

In fact, they had long wanted to tell him. The next instant, Peter, with the naturalness of an acknowledged leader, stepped out in front of the others, giving their answer.

"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!"

The Master's face suddenly filled with a transparent gladness deeper than that on a victor's face, when he reviews the columns of his soldiers in a victory parade. The apostles instantly sensed that their confession had filled their Master with supreme gladness.

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven."

As the strange words died away, a deep and sacred silence engulfed the little group, leaving each man to think his own thoughts. Now they knew in truth who their Master was, and this knowledge made them realize that from this moment on he had forever stamped his name and purpose on their lives.

In the prolonged silence, the Twelve recalled the boats and the customs office which they had left to follow the Master's call. They thought of the ordination speech which he had given to them on the mountain, when he had chosen them to be his apostles. On those occasions, they had been overwhelmed with the honor which he had bestowed upon them. Today, here, in his divine presence they were speechless with awe at their own extreme unworthiness.

They were following the Son of the Living God.

At length, the Lord spoke again, warning them that they had now been entrusted with the greatest secret of all and strictly charging them to tell no one that he was the Christ.

During the days which followed a new spirit seemed to take hold of the apostles. They became too preoccupied with the immensity of the new common secret to wish to disturb each other with speculative talk or everyday worries. Each man's heart changed into a temple of adoration filled with concentrated personal meditation.

They had been confronted with a Reality which they could not fathom. They knew only that their faith now had been exalted from the fluctuating things of this world to a Rock which was eternally safe in him, in whom they had believed. From here on, whatever happened he would not fail.

He had also spoken of the keys of the kingdom and given them a mysterious power to bind and to loose on earth and in heaven. Their Lord was building a living temple of men and women, who believed in him, and this kingdom would stand forever victorious over the power of death. He had called this fellowship his church and against it nothing could ever prevail.

These dark sayings filled their minds with a mixed sense of hope and foreboding. At moments, they were deeply frightened at the thought that their lives had been taken completely out of their own hands. Something told them that they had now crossed the threshold of the inevitable leading to the unknown and the unpredictable.

They experienced a new humility which told them that henceforth they were the spiritual compatriots of Abraham and Moses.

After a few days, they began to feel a spiritual restlessness, as they wondered where their Master would go next and what great events lay ahead.

With all this, they proved totally unprepared for the spiritual hurricane which hit them. One day their Lord took them aside and told them in plain and intensely serious words exactly what lay ahead. The Son of man must go to Jerusalem! There he would be rejected by the elders. There he would suffer many things from the chief priests and the scribes. He would be killed; and after three days he would rise again.

He spoke plainly, and the frightening finality of his momentous prophecy terrified the apostles.

They were so scandalized and aghast that they first refused to believe what their ears had heard. Therefore, their Master had to repeat his predictions again and again.

At length, the Twelve recalled that he had uttered some such mysterious thoughts before, when they were still in Galilee. Dimly they remembered a word about the bridegroom being taken away from them. Also something about the sign of Jonah and a dark prophecy about tearing down the temple and building it up after three days. Yet, it was only today that he had spoken in unmistakable words of his going up to Jerusalem, his suffering and death.

Their resistance and incredulity grew the more as they began to reason, attempting to put things and thoughts together. It was not only that their own dreams lay crushed before them, but, even worse, they sensed that if his dire predictions were fulfilled, the salvation and deliverance of the people of Israel would never be realized.

At long last, a gleam of hope seemed to enlighten their

struggling troubled minds. They confided in Peter, that these evil things, which the Lord had told them, might actually come to happen, if they themselves did not now begin to fight the malicious Pharisees and protect him, whom they called their Lord, from the wiles of his murderous adversaries.

They suddenly felt deeply humiliated by remembering that they had never defended him in front of the Pharisees or protected him by preventing these jealous, insidious leaders from coming near to their Master.

With Peter they swore that henceforth the Pharisees would be stopped at any cost. They sighed with relief, as Peter walked up to the Lord and took him aside.

"God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

Peter spoke with warm humility and conviction, but the Lord, turning to observe the assembled apostles, answered Peter with a fierce intensity which shook his whole being.

"Get thee behind me, Satan! Thou art an offense to me, for thou doest not fathom the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Peter and the other apostles froze into a dumbfounded horror which made them stand like wooden statues against the setting sun.

The following day, the Lord returned with the Twelve to the other disciples and the people who had followed after him. He greeted all cheerfully as he began to teach them. There was a new eagerness in his voice, as though he had been longing for this opportunity to lead them on to a deeper understanding of his glad tidings. He knew that they were ready for the challenge.

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

"For whoever will save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's sake shall find it.

"For what does it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

"Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

"For the Son of man shall come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he shall reward every man according to his work.

"Verily, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

When he finished speaking, he departed with the Twelve, leaving the other disciples standing in small groups discussing what they had just heard. Most of them were young men eager to make the most out of their lives. What the Master said about denying one's self and carrying one's cross did not frighten them in the least, since they were ready to die for him.

Toward the end of this upsetting week, with its mysterious and seemingly contradictory teachings, the Master suddenly took with him Peter, James and John and disappeared in the direction of the steep mountain to the north.

By nightfall the four men had finished the long and arduous mountain climb. As the three apostles began making ready for the night, their Master went a little farther apart from them to pray.

Presently the apostles saw him transfigured: his face shining like the sun, his garments glistening in dazzling white.

As they watched in awe, Moses and Elijah appeared and they began to talk with Jesus of his departing which was to be consummated at Jerusalem.

Although exhausted from the mountain climb and heavy with sleep, the apostles were keenly aroused by the sight. In fear and trembling, they stood wondering what this sign might mean.

As Moses and Elijah were departing, the frightened and sleepy Peter, not knowing what he was saying, made a nonsensical suggestion to the Lord about building booths for the celestial visitors. In the next moment he was thrown to the ground by the impact of a voice out of heaven.

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him!"

Filled with awe and fears, the three apostles covered their heads with their hands.

But Jesus came and touched them, saying:

"Rise, and have no fear."

When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

In the nocturnal mountain wind the apostles lay awake, an incessant chain of thoughts passing through their minds. All fear had now left them, but their thoughts were kept awake with questioning wonder.

The next day, as they were coming down the mountain, the Lord commanded Peter, James and John to keep silent about their celestial experience.

"Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is risen again from the dead."

They nodded in solemn agreement but now they asked him a question which had been on their minds for a long time.

"Why do the scribes say that Elijah must first come?"

"Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they knew him not, but have done to him whatever they pleased. Likewise shall the Son of man suffer of them."

Again the apostles nodded. They understood that he was speaking of John the Baptist.

Peter, James and John kept their silence and told no one what they had seen. But whenever the three were alone, they kept pondering together about what rising from the dead might mean.

12. The Cruel Roman

As THE MASTER and his three companions reached the plains at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, they met a great crowd shouting its happy welcome. In the sharp light of the early August forenoon, they seemed to be more pleased than ever to have him among them again.

An incident had just happened, which proved the Master's indispensability. A father had brought his epileptic son to be healed, only to find that the Nazarene had gone away the evening before into the mountain regions to the north. In his dire need the father had turned to the remaining apostles for healing help. They had tried repeatedly to heal the afflicted boy, but in vain. Their dismal failure had been both embarrassing and heartbreaking. Powerless and ashamed, the apostles had given up, only to be mocked and set upon by the scribes in the crowd, who had watched with gleeful eyes.

Angry arguments and counter accusations rent the air above the sorely disappointed father. Harsh and furious words flew between the two groups.

The defeated apostles tried to stand their ground, recalling their Master's words, when he had given them power to

heal the sick in body and mind. Their attempts at defending an impossible situation, however, had only made their defeat the more obvious and humiliating.

Now, as the Master himself approached, the boy's father rushed forward to meet him. "Master, I beg you to look upon my son, for he is my only son. He is an epileptic. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not."

The nine apostles let their heads drop in admission of defeat. Then their Lord spoke. His saddened voice carried across the vast crowd.

"O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring your son here."

As the father was guiding the sick boy forward to Jesus, a sudden fit threw the epileptic child to the ground, where he rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

"How long has he had this?"

"From childhood. And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity upon us and help us."

"If you can believe. All things are possible to him who believes."

The father's answer was immediate, filled with intense prayer, born out of his anguished faith.

"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

The next instant the Lord rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. The tension of the crowd was relieved in roaring shouts of praise, glorifying the majesty of God. The apostles rejoiced at the sight as their dismal defeat was suddenly wiped out by their Master's love and power. Gladness filled their whole being. They did

not notice that the scribes were walking away, heads lowered in angry sullenness.

Taking the Master aside, the apostles later asked him privately what the reason was for their dismal failure. He sensed their sadness at the inability; they evidently looked upon it as a rebuke to their common cause.

"Why could we not cast him out?"

"This kind cannot be driven out except by prayer and fasting."

His answer made them marvel, for even though he had not been there he knew what had been missing.

Presently, he took the Twelve with him and began to march southward. They could still faintly hear the echoes of the jubilant crowd, marveling at the healing, when the Master stopped and called the apostles to him. His face was heavy and solemn, as he spoke to them:

"The Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and when he is killed, he shall rise the third day."

There was no answer. This was now the second time he had spoken in plain words of the incomprehensible fate ahead of him. The apostles looked at one another in silence, and as the knowing eyes of Peter found those of James and John, the three apostles secretly recalled the heavenly experience which they had shared with him in the mountain the previous night.

The Twelve were gripped by a deep fear making it impossible for them to ask any further questions.

At length, the Lord took his place, as always, in front of their little fellowship. They followed, each man an inner island of heavy and confused thoughts.

During the following days they slowly made their way home to Capernaum. The Master led them on side roads and paths, bypassing the towns and villages. Ever since Caesarea Philippi and the prophesies of his death, he seemed ready to close his Galilean ministry, in order to move south to Judea and Jerusalem.

In the beginning of their homeward journey, the apostles missed the customary picture of great crowds, which for more than a year had been following in their wake wherever they went. They recalled the main streets packed with men, women and children. They remembered the thrill, the awe, the quivering silence, the shouts and the arguments.

In their Master the masses of Galilee had found a friend and defender. He had challenged them and lifted them, and when they brought the sick and the suffering to him for healing, he had treated each individual case with the careful consideration of a true physician. He had greeted each person with the quiet cheerfulness of his unhurried love, restoring their health and strengthening their faltering faith.

This the apostles remembered as their little group moved southward. Now things seemed different. The Master was filled with a majestic serenity, his eyes tranquil and lucid, as he walked mile after mile through the colorful autumn of his Galilee.

The last day of the journey, while moving down the west

side of the Lake of Galilee, the apostles were filled with happy anticipation of the pending homecoming. With the carefree positiveness of youth, they put behind them the disturbing thoughts of the last few days since the Master had told them what he expected to meet in Jerusalem. The friendly breeze from the lake which they knew so well seemed suddenly to restore their zest and equilibrium. They became their old selves.

Somehow they began between themselves to give vent to their youthful dreams of the coming kingdom. Together they reveled in the glories which they were going to share, when their Master enthroned himself in his regal seat in Jerusalem. Before long their conversation turned to a question which had taunted them, individually, for a long time: who was the greatest among them? Who was going to sit closest to the throne?

Although the question seemed to have risen out of nowhere, it was only too apparent that it had been in their dreaming, self-centered hearts a long time. Therefore, what started as a suggestive thought soon changed into a loud, bitter debate of twelve jealous men. Instinctively they had known that, since the Master had chosen the number Twelve, it must mean that his kingdom would be the new Israel. It seemed obvious also that he had chosen them to be co-rulers with him over the twelve tribes, even though the Master himself had never assigned any individual task or special preferment to any one of them.

Even so, they had been dreaming each for himself of the place which they rightfully and hopefully had felt entitled to.

Now, as they all were giving words to their secret ambitions, they suddenly made the painful discovery that each of

the apostles had nourished self-seeking notions. With the inevitableness of jealousy, their discussion flared up into a nasty, harsh battle of mutually accusing words.

As their verbal fight at length died away in an atmosphere of frustrated silence, they discovered that they had fallen far behind their Master.

Shame made them hasten their steps to catch up with him.

By nightfall, they entered an almost deserted Capernaum, and made their way to Peter's house.

After the simple evening meal, the Lord gathered them in the privacy of those nocturnal fellowship hours, which they had shared with him so often. This night he began by asking them a question.

"What were you discussing among yourselves on the way?"

They all remembered and remained silent.

He looked at them with a patient, pure look, which deepened the silence between them. At length, he seated himself among them.

"If any one desires to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

Then he called a little child into the room, giving it a smile of warm love. He placed his arm around it and continued his words:

"Whoever receives such a child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives not me but him who sent me."

The infinite tenderness of the whole scene filled the Twelve with strange thoughts of his kingdom, so mysteriously different from the kind of world which had been in their own hearts, earlier in the day.

As the evening progressed, the friendly atmosphere of the apostle's home loosened their tongues. They became an enchanted circle of listeners, as the Master proceeded to answer many questions with which they had been grappling in their own minds.

"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

Peter was asking and the Lord turned to him with a look of searching love.

"I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven."

As incredulity filled their eyes, the apostles sat in surprised silence until John spoke.

"Master, we saw a man casting out devils in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us."

The other apostles nodded in approval.

"Do not forbid him; for there is no one who does a miracle in my name that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name because you belong to Christ, verily I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

As so many times before, the Master had corrected their limited understanding in his never-ending attempts to widen and deepen their limited loves.

Later he turned their thoughts to another side of their lives so woefully inadequate and uttered mysterious words which they were never to forget:

"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Galilee was suddenly filled with disturbing and tragic news out of Jerusalem.

The Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, had again killed some Jews. This time his victims were Galileans, who had been visiting the Holy City. The Romans had murdered them, as they made their sacrifices in the Temple, and Pilate had ordered their blood mingled with their sacrifices.

This outrageous deed enflamed the whole nation. Main Street of every town and village throughout Galilee seethed with murderous hatred of the tyrannical procurator of Judea, who had used his *jus gladii* to execute Galileans, subjects of Herod Antipas at Tiberias.

The incensed people recalled that this was already the third or fourth time that Pontius Pilate had attacked the Jews, and they feared that his cynical Roman contempt for their people of Israel would lead him to new misdeeds.

During the three years since he arrived to take over Judea after his predecessor Valerius Gratus, this stubborn and haughty Roman had shown himself to be a true counterpart of his emperor, Tiberius, who also hated the Jews and had driven them out of Rome.

The new outrage, killing people worshipping in the Temple, made all the land talk of the Roman procurator and his previous attempts at terrorizing their Jewish nation. Three years previously, when he had barely arrived from Rome, Pontius Pilate had ordered the Imperial banner brought into their Holy City by night. The next morning, the outraged populace had awakened to find the banners with the pictures of Emperor Tiberius hoisted near the Temple. To Israel this was an act of blasphemy and the people of Jerusalem had risen as one man to protest, marching

down to Caesarea-by-the-Sea, to demonstrate in front of the palace of the Roman procurator. With scornful contempt the cynical Pontius Pilate had gazed at the milling, raging crowd of Jews and refused to remove the Imperial banner from Jerusalem. For five days all Caesarea had been packed with the threatening mob, shrieking their demands. For five days Pontius Pilate refused to budge, certain that his two cohorts of soldiers could cope with the ugly situation. The Roman Empire was not used to be dictated to by a weaponless crowd.

On the sixth day, the new procurator decided to try a trick by inviting the mob into the great Greek race-course at Caesarea. Rumors were started suggesting that the matter was about to be settled. However, as soon as thousands of protesting Jews had packed the arena, they found themselves surrounded by soldiers with drawn swords. The fearful moments of the dramatic clash between the Roman tyranny and the Jewish faith were never forgotten. Suddenly, the whole encircled mob of Jewish men had knelt down in the arena, baring their necks to the swords of the soldiers.

Not a sword was used however. Pontius Pilate found himself defeated by a religious loyalty, the like of which he had never heard of in the whole empire. He was forced to order the Imperial banners out of the Holy City. The victorious Jews, praising Lord God, Almighty, returned to Zion in astonished triumph.

About a year later, Pontius Pilate set about to build an aqueduct into Jerusalem from the pools southeast of Bethlehem some twenty-five miles from the capital. To defray the expensive building costs, Pilate appropriated funds of the Temple treasury. The Jewish answer was prompt. Violent

uprisings in Jerusalem protested against this sacrilegious use of Temple money for such worldly purposes. Pontius Pilate reacted with surprised, truculent anger to this strange and unreasonable religion, which could not grasp that the water was of great benefit not least to the Temple, with its unending bloody sacrifices. In all his imperial service the Roman procurator had never met a god who interfered in the affairs of the state. He decided to teach this stiff-necked nation and its leaders a lesson in civil obedience.

To this end he sent soldiers, armed with clubs, disguised as Jewish pilgrims into the Holy City, and at a given signal the clubs resounded through the narrow streets, leaving many dead.

Even this act of terrorism availed Pilate nothing. The Temple won. But the procurator had managed to become a symbol of hate and suspicion.

In Capernaum, his most recent attack on Israel, the wanton killings in the Temple itself, stirred the populace more deeply than anything had done, since the appearance of the strange prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, the year before. A creeping sense of pending disaster took hold of the citizens, especially since the new martyrs were Galileans. Everywhere the men of Capernaum gathered to discuss the murderous tyrant and the uncertain fate of their nation under the Roman heel. The crowds along Main Street or outside the customs house, along the fish wharfs or in the town market and in the workshops were loud and angry with injured national pride and hot for revenge.

"When are we going to be man enough to get rid of this Pontius Pilate? If we don't watch out, he will prove as evil as Archelaus. I was there the day when Archelaus' army

fought us in the Temple, leaving three thousand Israelites lying in their blood."

The old man spoke with hateful indignation. He appeared ready to march on Jerusalem once more. A young, tall boy moved close to the old fighter of the Archelaus disaster.

"I am a member of the Zealots and proud of it! I can't understand why our people continue to take all these humiliations, lying down. You all seem scared. Perhaps you are too tired to stand up and fight for Israel? When I attended the Sabbath school and heard about Gideon and other ancient fighters of the Lord, I kept dreaming of the day when we would show the heathens what the Lord's men could do. But today, we Zealots seem to be the only ones who are willing to risk anything for Israel. We stand for home rule and independence. If we could get others to help, this land would again be free. The Lord of Hosts would not leave us in the lurch!"

The group listened to his fiery words. Some of the men nodded assent, but most remained silent, looking woefully at the eager young man.

"I used to have some wild dreams, too, but you seem to forget that the Roman Empire stretches its claws all over the world. The Romans are not going to let themselves be beaten by as tiny a nation as ours. We have to bide our time." The wordly-wise merchant ended his words with a tired sigh.

"You talk just like the Sadducees in Jerusalem, and you call yourself a Galilean," hissed another young man. "I think the Sadducees are traitors to our nation! They are so mindful of their own wealth and power that they have no honor left in them. Did you ever hear of a Sadducee shedding a drop of blood for Israel?"

"Not so hasty, young one. The Sadducees are of our own men and they are the wise ones. Perhaps they realize that it would be hopeless to start a rebellion against the Romans at this point. Jerusalem is surrounded by three cohorts of Roman soldiers. Also, Pontius Pilate—the Lord slay him—could send for help to the Roman military command in Damascus. You are too young to remember the atrocities Varus committed in Sepphoris. I was there. I saw the city sacked and burned, its people sold into slavery and its leaders rotting on Roman crosses, the vultures feasting upon them. We certainly don't want to see anything like that happen to Jerusalem."

The tanner foreman with the bony face spoke with the conviction of a man who remembered much and thought deeply.

"But the Lord would not permit the Holy City to be sacked by the *gojims*."

"It has happened before, remember?"

"It might well happen again."

"Not if we could arouse the whole nation to fight the Lord's battles."

"This is not Gideon's day and age! These are evil days when we have to face the armor of the Roman world power."

"But they will pass away, some day."

"Some day, yes, certainly. But right now I am content that the Pharisees are right, in admonishing us to try to keep together as a chosen people, obeying the Law and the traditions of our elders."

"Nobody denies that; but you don't win a battle like this just by being pious and keeping the Sabbath. I hate this do-nothing-now policy! It's getting us nowhere. Furthermore,

it is not the way of our forefathers. They were heroes!"

"The young man has a point there. Today we have no real leaders, however. They are all dilly-dallying. Why, if one of our old national heroes were here today, he would be ashamed of us. What has happened to our courage?"

"Well spoken. Now, take this Nazarene, the prophet mighty in words and deeds, as they call him."

"What of him? He is a disappointment, if there ever was one!"

"I am not so sure that we have heard the last of him yet. I hear he is going to Jerusalem."

"And what will he accomplish there? All he really has with him are the Twelve whom he calls his apostles, and some women."

"And don't forget his tax collectors."

"Tax collectors or not, he is still the greatest prophet we have had for a long, long time."

"I grant you that, but he is not a leader. He is not a Moses."

"What about Moses? I have often dreamt about what another Moses would do, if he came. He would certainly meet the Romans in the power of the Lord, just as the first Moses did with Pharaoh and the Egyptians."

"There was a real liberator!"

"And this is exactly what made me leave the Nazarene. I used to think that he was the Messiah who would lead our people to salvation and freedom. But after that hopeless speech which he made in our synagogue about his being the Bread from heaven and all that, I decided that I had had enough. He is a good man and he means well; but he

does not fit this day and age, when we are facing a national crisis."

"You evaluate him correctly. He is just a spiritual dreamer. I, for one, have never been able to figure out if this kingdom of his is supposed to be in heaven or on earth."

"That's where he is so totally different from Moses. Moses was a fighter and a leader. He understood what his people needed. He walked right in and liberated our nation from Egyptian slavery. He forced the Pharaoh to let Israel go."

"But this prophet from Nazareth preached that one should love even one's enemies. Such utter nonsense! His kind of thinking would leave Israel in bondage forever. That is the exact reason why we Zealots have chosen to forget him."

"I wonder if your party has not been too hasty. We know that Jesus has heavenly power to do miracles. We have all seen it."

"Certainly, but where does it take him?"

"He heals the sick, and that is well enough. But if he only would use his power as Moses did, he would be unbeatable."

"Perhaps he is holding back? Perhaps he will change when he gets to Jerusalem?"

"I doubt it. In fact, we have not seen him do any great miracles of late. These days he is just preaching. Mind you, he is a wonderful preacher, but this world will not be changed with mere words."

"Or going around blessing the children."

"Not only that, but he seems to be only half a Jew. In the beginning, I felt that the scribes and the Pharisees were

being too hard on him. But I have come to agree with them. He is really breaking down our nation's strength and unity. He refuses to adhere to the traditions of the elders. He breaks the Sabbath, he eats with unclean hands, he mingles with the riff-raff and sets his own words up against those of Moses himself."

"Yes, and he has said that if the Temple was ever destroyed, he himself would build it up in three days."

"The more I see and hear of him, the more of a riddle he becomes."

As the discussion slowed to a halt, the old fighter from Sepphoris suggested that they all go to Peter's house to ask the Nazarene what he thought of this last outrage Pontius Pilate perpetrated upon their fellow Galileans visiting in the Temple.

The suggestion met with unanimous approval and the whole group turned down one of the narrow streets leading toward the lake and Peter's house.

As it happened, the Master had not heard of Pontius Pilate's murderous assault on the Galileans, so they informed him and asked for his comment.

He gave them a penetrating look as they waited for his answer.

"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?"

The empty look on their faces showed that they did not follow his strange train of thought. Nobody had ever talked of the heroes being sinners.

"I tell you, No. But unless you repent you shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were

worse sinners than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you shall all likewise perish!"

The disgusted listeners turned to one another and shook their heads. A jeering smile crossed their faces. Once again the prophet of Nazareth had demonstrated his complete lack of understanding of what their suffering nation really needed. In silent frustration they turned their backs on him and walked away.

"What good would repentance do us?"

"And he did not even mention Pontius Pilate!"

"I told you he is a riddle."

The people of Capernaum were startled at the new pattern of behavior of the Master and his apostles. Ever since their recent return from the north, they seemed to prefer the exclusiveness of their own company. There were no longer any huge mass meetings nor any preaching missions into the neighboring countryside.

Rumor had it that the Nazarene was about to take his flock with him to Judea and the capital. Some observers who had been watching the homes of Peter and the other disciples spread reports that many of the faithful were coming to Capernaum from other districts. These new arrivals seemed prepared to follow the Master on the southbound trek. Most of them were young men, filled with eager anticipation at being called to a place in the inner circle.

For days Capernaum was buzzing with excited curiosity and wild speculations; but the disciples had no new story to tell.

Then it happened.

One golden fall morning, the prophet of Nazareth led

his flock down to the lake, several hundreds of them.

With the Twelve standing in a semi-circle behind him, he called out seventy men by name and commissioned them to go, two by two, into every town and place he himself was about to visit.

In a speech of simplicity and stark clarity he gave them their marching orders:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send out laborers into his harvest."

"Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no man by the way . . . Heal the sick . . . and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' "

As shortly thereafter the seventy men marched through the side streets into Main Street where they turned south, thousands of Capernaum's men, women, and children came running to watch their departure. One of the scribes, seeing the seventy disappear, wondered aloud if the Master had chosen the number seventy as prophetic of the seventy nations, which the traditions of the elders held to be the number of the nations in the world. Yet, such a dream would be as preposterous as to believe that his twelve apostles were supposed to head the twelve tribes of the new kingdom of heaven about which this Nazarene was always preaching. Nevertheless, it was now clear to all that the prophet was moving his operations into Judea.

The Capernaum citizens, who heard the learned scribe commenting out loud, felt their hearts contract within them. They agreed among themselves that their city would miss

the prophet. A sense of foreboding emptiness made them walk home in disturbed silence.

The next few days afforded the Twelve many an opportunity to share their memories and experiences. They recalled the overwhelming events of the crowded months, which had passed so swiftly, since they had been called to follow him. They also rejoiced in their having from the beginning encouraged one another to memorize verbatim the Master's sayings. In that manner they now had accurate accounts of the astounding happenings in the towns and on the road. They had spent many hours together examining one another in order to make sure that they agreed on the exact wording and the correct reporting of their Master's words and deeds. They were convinced that they were participants in the greatest thing that ever happened on earth. They knew in their hearts that one day they would love to tell the whole story. Those who knew how to write had been of great help. Secretly they admitted that the Lord must surely have known that they were doing this, yet he had never indicated that he knew they were memorizing or recording it. At any rate, he had never signified that he disapproved.

For more than a year now they had lived with him, day and night. What he predicted when he had opened his work had happened to the last iota: the blind saw, the lame walked, the unclean were healed, the deaf heard, the dead were raised, and the good news had been preached to the poor. Peter, James and John knew even greater things of which he had forbidden them to tell. But all of them had long since

realized that the Lord had bound them to himself and to one another in a common, unfathomable solidarity.

Together they recalled the tumultous masses of the early months, when tens of thousands from every region of the land had come to acclaim him. Their Master had been the hero of every Main Street and they themselves had basked in his incredible popularity.

When the mass enthusiasm abated and the scribes and Pharisees master-minded the opposition to his work and teaching, the apostles had constantly wondered at the sinless holiness of their Master. Utterly removed from any sentimentalism, the Lord had always been ready for battle, whenever the adversaries tempted and tested him. With the fearless courage of God's truth he had invariably brought his enemies to defeat and silence.

When they thought of the rigors of the open road and the rich, quiet evenings of their fellowship together with him, the apostles could not help but wonder at his stamina, balance and positiveness. His sunny temper and his unending kindness had lifted them into a world, pure and perfect, beyond their imagination. Hence they had all felt overjoyed at Caesarea Philippi, when they heard Simon Peter confess what they had all come to believe: that he was the Son of the living God.

By now they were fully aware, however, of the fact that the masses did not share this faith in him. The apostles remained perplexed at the inexplicable disbelief of the people who had actually been eye-witnesses to all that their Master had said and done in Galilee. At times they shared their Master's profound sadness over the Galileans. At other

times they told one another that such heedless unbelief deserved divine punishment.

Such conflicting emotions kept stirring through their hearts as they were preparing to follow him out of Galilee. When they heard him commission the seventy, they remembered their own ordination. They recalled the healings and the popular acclaim of their own mission journey. They wondered whether the seventy would meet with the same kind of success when they were now marching into new missionary territories, preparing the way for him who sent them.

They were afraid to ask their Master. It was not that they doubted the power which he had given to the seventy. What disturbed them was rather the indelible memory of the impossible words he had twice given them on the road from Caesarea Philippi. Solemnly he had privately told them of his own suffering and death. Every day since, the Twelve had tried to put that prophecy out of their minds; but their hearts kept telling them that whatever the Master said was the truth. It would come to pass. Many times while they continued to walk in the pleasant sunshine of their dreams about their Messiah, they found themselves suddenly thrown into the tantalizing shadow of his frightening prediction.

Over the last year their fellowship had established them in his love. Yet, they had always sensed that a gulf of radiant holiness kept him apart from them. He was from above, but they were ordinary men, nobodies whom he had chosen in his sovereign magnanimity.

He had taught them to pray; but whenever he prayed, he left them and went away to pray alone.

He answered their questions; but he never sought their advice.

Ever since the seventy left Capernaum, the Twelve had been thinking of what would happen to his pending mission to Judea. What kind of reception might they expect from that harsh, self-conscious populace? Both their Master and they were Galileans and, yet, even here, among his own, he had not managed to sway the masses, except for a time. By now most of the Galileans had reverted to the trivial joys and cares of their accustomed way of life.

As if he had been reading their thoughts, the Master one night told them a parable:

"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow, he knows not how. For the earth brings forth fruit of itself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

The apostles listened to the ringing victory in his calm and collected teaching voice, as his cheerful confidence put all their worries about the future to rest.

There would be a kingly harvest.

The Challenger

13. Fire Upon the Earth

ONE MORNING the Master took the Twelve with him and began to go south into Judea. They were followed by some faithful disciples, most of whom hailed from Capernaum, Bethsaida and the other towns along the Lake of Galilee. A few young men had come down from villages lying at the foot of Mount Hermon.

Marching down the highway toward Tiberias, the disciples, eyes shining with eager expectation, were deep in happy conversation, when the Master suddenly made a dramatic halt.

He stood at the summit of a hill from which Capernaum and other towns could be seen. When he turned and faced the people following him, the frightened men and women saw that into his face had come an expression of severe sadness. His arms were raised high and his voice trembled in words of awe-striking judgment:

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you."

Directing his gaze of holy judgment toward Capernaum, he continued:

"And you, Capernaum, which has been exalted to heaven, you shall be brought down to hell. For if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

After these heavy words of final farewell to his Galilee, the Lord returned to the road ahead, proceeding with sad slowness.

The Twelve and the others followed him in shocked silence. Bypassing the pagan Tiberias, the quiet group made its way eastward to the border regions of Samaria.

As he entered one of the many small villages in that region, he encountered ten lepers, who stood at a distance, shouting their pitiful, eager, "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us!"

He halted and ordered them to go and show themselves to the priests, who had authority in matters of health and healing. Hearing his command, the ten men immediately turned and walked away with happy strides.

Presently one of the ten lepers came running after the Master and his flock. Shouting loud praises to God for his sudden healing, he fell on his face at Jesus' feet and poured out his thanks.

All could hear that his dialect was Samaritan.

The Master looked down the road after the departing nine and then at the healed man at his feet.

"Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Did no one return to give glory to God except this stranger?"

In the brief pause which followed, the Master's face filled with immeasurable love, as he took the Samaritan's hand and said:

"Rise and go your way; your faith has made you whole."

A group of Pharisees accosted him later on the way and testing him, they asked, with a smile of contempt: "Rabbi, when is the Kingdom of God coming?"

Disregarding their insolence, the Master answered them calmly:

"The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be seen, nor shall they say, 'Lo, here!' or 'Lo, there!' for behold, the Kingdom of God is within you."

Leaving the silenced Pharisees in their perplexity, he pressed forward. On reaching the crossroads where the highway turned southward into Samaria, he resolutely entered that hostile land, where Jews knew they were unwelcome. Some of the people following him seemed to hesitate for a moment, but Peter and the other apostles, who had been with him the first time he came through Samaria, reminded one another of the two rich days they had then shared with him at Sychar.

That afternoon, however, they were all aghast to find that two of the seventy, who had been sent to a Samaritan village to announce his coming, met them with the discouraging news that the people of that village refused to receive the Lord, because he was enroute to Jerusalem, the city loathed by all Samaritans.

James and John flew into an immediate rage of moral and racial indignation. Angrily they bespoke the feelings of

the followers when they asked the Master, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did?"

Instantly, the Master turned to the two brothers, his eyes blazing with holy resentment:

"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of man has not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."

With that he turned meekly and went quietly on to the neighboring village.

As the days passed, his southbound journey became known and the crowds around him increased.

The seventy had been successful in preparing the way for him. Thus when he arrived in the region of Judea, near the Jordan, the Twelve felt that the early days of his Galilean success might be about to be repeated even in Judea and Perea. People gathered from towns and villages to hail him with loud Hosannahs. He taught them and healed their sick. His fame flew ahead of him wherever he went, turning his Judean journey into a mass movement of high hopes.

The spirits of the Twelve rose. Once again they were dreaming of Messianic glory, seeing public acclaim coming their way. Reassured in their hearts, they feasted their minds on glittering expectations of jubilant days ahead.

One day, when they were alone with him, Simon Peter, their spokesman, brought their impetuous expectations to the Master. "Lo, we have forsaken everything and followed you —." Before Simon was permitted to continue, the answer came:

"Verily, I say to you, there is no one who has forsaken house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who shall not receive a hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first."

The apostles did not find his strange answer too reassuring, but they did not dare to ask him any further questions.

They continued to talk among themselves, however, about the future glory which most certainly must lie ahead. They admitted that they would have liked a more concrete, direct answer. After all, they felt entitled to some remuneration. They were only human and they had staked their lives and fortunes on following him.

Some days later, the tempting question once again broke out into the open.

This time, James, John and their mother, the wife of Zebedee, came forward to the Master as he stood alone, apart from the Twelve. The mother, kneeling before him, and with begging eyes fixed upon him, spoke in an excited voice.

"Master, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

"What do you want?"

"Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, the one on your right hand, and the other on your left, in your kingdom."

"You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

"We are able," the two apostle-brothers assured him.

"You shall indeed drink of my cup and be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized; but to sit on my right

hand and on my left is not mine to grant, but it shall be given to them for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

As the dejected mother and her two disappointed sons walked away, they were confronted by ten angry fellow apostles, who had been within earshot.

A violent argument rent the air, as the ten turned upon James and John with all the bitterness of their indignant jealousy.

The Master, who was a sad, unwilling eyewitness to the ugly scene, called them all back to himself.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and that they who are mighty exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. Whoever will be great among you, let him be your servant, and whoever would be first among you let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

He spoke to the apostles with a quiet lucidity, which stilled the emotional storm in their hearts.

With the furtiveness of shamed humiliation, they all looked around, and were glad to find that no one but their own circle had experienced the distasteful incidents.

Their group was cheered some days later by the return of the seventy. Two by two, they were coming back to report to the Master. Enthusiastic stories filled the camp. Gathered before the Lord, their youthful exclamations reported that even the demons had been subject to his name.

The Twelve listened to the seventy as their minds filled

with happy memories of their own preaching mission up north.

Seeing the dangerous and excessive enthusiasm of the seventy, the Lord greeted them with a strange word about his having seen Satan falling like lightning from heaven. Then he gave them his promise that they should receive power over all the might of the enemy. These visionary words they did not grasp, but they did understand the clear, personal meaning of his concluding greeting:

"Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Some among the Twelve nodded their heads, but then stopped immediately, when they saw that other fellow apostles were slowly shaking theirs. The nodders suddenly wondered if they had really grasped what the Lord tried to impress upon them. Perhaps they had just acquired a thoughtless, haughty habit of appearing wise and pious. They froze with inner shame as they remembered how often the Master had warned them that self-satisfaction was the hallmark of the self-righteous.

As the days passed they were moving deeper into Judean territory, and the Twelve began to miss their Galilee. They started to talk together of the green hills around the Lake of Galilee, comparing them with the brown barrenness of these Judean ridges, rolling through a region almost devoid of living streams. The volcanic deadness of the landscape depressed them as they longed for the fertile beauty of their native Galilee, with its blue lake, fruit groves, refreshing

breeze, and the evening sun on the eternal snow of the mountains in the distant north.

For a year and a half they had walked in Galilee with their Master and Friend. He had made them see the glory of God in all things, and they had come to feel that their home region was almost a part of Paradise itself. By contrast, this Judean territory was a harsh and barren country, arid and cruel, and its people seemed to resemble the land in which they lived.

The apostles discovered that the Judean masses were eager enough to listen to the glad news of the Master. In fact, the crowds here shouted with the same loud enthusiasm at his healings as they had done up in Galilee. Yet, one could not help but feel that here there was an undercurrent of resistance abroad, as if the proud Judeans resented their Galilean invasion. The age-old Judean reserve against anything Galilean seemed to predominate, and the Twelve bore the brunt of the condescending remarks and witty barbs of many a Judean tongue. They resented this forebearing attitude not only because they were self-conscious Galileans, but especially because they sensed that this Judean haughtiness made these men and women unaware of the greatness of him who was now blessing Judea with his visit.

However, in the spirit and behavior of their Master the Twelve could not detect any change. He was continually fresh and cheerful, kind and full of the inner glory which had distinguished his work in Galilee.

On several occasions, it had become clear, however, that Judea was Pharisee territory, much more so than Galilee. The Temple spy net lay tightly across the whole region and it was obvious that the entry of the Master into Judea had

put the spies on the alert. Following him from town to town, they watched him and reported his words. Whenever the Lord held forth preaching and healing in the Main street of Judean towns, the Twelve found no difficulty in discovering narrow and angry eyes of Jerusalem emissaries. In many cases the opposition was carried directly to the Master through the customary attacks by learned scribes, clad in their well-known official robes.

Their presence had increasingly become part of the picture, but the Lord met such disputatious intellectuals with the same unruffled spirit of calm integrity which the Twelve had witnessed on countless previous occasions.

Thus, one day as a lawyer stood up to put the Master to the test, a moral duel followed which the Twelve never forgot. The legal expert raised the opening question with the attitude of an academic superiority of which he thought himself in possession, saying, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Ready for battle, the Master immediately countered with another question, directed at the lawyer.

"What is written in the law? How do you read?"

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

The lawyer's answer, which came with even rapidity in a sure voice, had barely died away across the intensely curious crowd, when the Master took the unsuspecting expert to task.

"You have answered right; do this, and you shall live."

Intrigued by the consummate skill of the unlearned Nazarene, the gleeful crowd moved closer around the duel-

ists. For a moment, the lawyer seemed ready to walk away, but he suddenly turned to put a new question to his adversary, "And who is my neighbor?"

The Master gave the lawyer a glance full with serenity. Then, turning to the crowd with deep compassion in his eyes he began to tell them all a parable:

"A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him of his clothing and beat him, and departed, leaving him half-dead. By chance a certain priest came down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next morning he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' "

As the Lord finished the parable, a deep, solemn hush remained over the crowd when the Master turned to the lawyer with a kind but compelling question:

"Which now of these three, do you think, was neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?"

"He who showed mercy on him."

The debate, which had started as an intellectual duel, ended with a stern personal challenge from the Master:

"Go and do likewise!"

As the crowd dispersed in humbled silence, each listener

realized that he had personally shared in the defeat of the stunned lawyer.

However, when they regained their composure, they angrily agreed that it was a tantalizing scandal that the prophet should have singled out a Samaritan as an example of moral goodness! That outrageous statement irritated their Judean minds, for it was accepted doctrine among them that the Samaritans were all traitors and heretics, who could never become neighbors of righteous Israelites!

The Feast of the Tabernacles was now drawing near. The roads began to fill with pilgrims making their way to the Temple. This time the crowds were considerably smaller than in the Passover pilgrimage, yet the trek through Judea ran in to tens of thousands. Also, the spirit of the men, women and children making the pilgrimage was exceptionally free and happy, for the Feast of the Tabernacles was the glad and boisterous harvest festival.

Only when some Pharisees or Levites passed by did a note of dour and self-impressed solemnity throw a shadow over the festive pilgrims.

One day, as the Master and his followers were watching pilgrims marching south through Judea, a group of Pharisees came passing by the place where he sat. The pious men had the long and bored faces of religious aristocrats. Since they were righteous men and despised others, they kept their own group protectively apart from the common people.

Suddenly the Master hailed these gentlemen of the Law,

bringing their walk to a halt. With careful and measured steps he met them on the highway and began to tell them a parable:

"Two men went up into the Temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess.' But the publican, standing far off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For every one who exalts himself shall be abased, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

As the insulted Pharisees went on their way, with cold hatred in their eyes, the hearts of some of the younger disciples filled with spontaneous admiration at the daring way of their Master. Their youthful minds had noticed how the parable had shocked and unnerved the pompous, righteous men, and they felt proud that they were in the company of a Master who, in insight and courage, was proving himself superior to any man.

The Twelve, however, reacted to the strange incident with thoughtful, worried silence. They had long since realized that their Lord never took any intellectual pleasure in besting an opponent in an argument. They recalled that the only aim of his teaching was a personal one, trying to make his opponent face the truth about himself and his personal way of living.

On this, as on several other occasions, they debated among themselves whether the Master was using the right

kind of strategy with which to further the cause of his kingdom in this difficult and alien region. Judea was obviously controlled and frightened by the Temple Pharisees. To the apostles it seemed that their Master was perhaps dealing too harshly with the Judeans, including the Pharisees who had just passed by. True enough, even on this journey the Master proclaimed the glad tidings and dealt with the common people in a spirit of unending loving-kindness and personal attention. The people heard him gladly here just as they had in their own Galilee. The seventy also reported that they had found receptive listeners both in Judea and in Perea. In fact, in some towns there had even been some individual Pharisees who were friendly or at least neutral enough to invite the Master to dine in their houses.

On such occasions, the Twelve wondered if it might not be a fruitful policy to attempt to win the good will of such leaders, and especially now when their Master was about to go up to Jerusalem to proclaim himself King.

The apostle John who had connections in high places in Jerusalem reported that even in the highest circles the Lord had made some secret, influential disciples. The names of Nicodemus and of Joseph of Arimathea had been mentioned. If this be true, the Twelve told one another, it would seem right to attempt to win more friends of that influential type. The kingdom would need them.

Yet, whenever they whispered such seemingly convincing ideas to one another, the Twelve always found that their argument ended up in a question mark. They confessed that this Judean journey frightened them; their little minds were in fearful confusion. The Lord twice had said that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer and to be killed, but they had

been unable to fathom what he intended to accomplish.

Their deepening anxiety made the Twelve cling closer to the Lord than ever. In him they found no trace of fear or hesitancy. He walked his way before their eyes now in the same vigorous manliness as on the day they had first met him in the encampment of John the Baptist. The spiteful hardness of his adversaries left no touch of bitterness in him; the maledictions of the spying Temple servants did not disturb his peace of soul.

One day he called his disciples, and seeing the growing fear in their hearts, he spoke to them:

"I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I have come to give peace on earth? I tell you, No: but rather division."

Hearing his clear voice, filled with regal dignity, put new courage into the hearts of the bewildered disciples:

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

The Twelve recalled the mass movement of Galilee. All that had passed away, but they were still with their Lord and Master. He had not changed.

14. The Light of the World

THE GAY Feast of the Tabernacles that year began in an atmosphere of restive wondering. The teeming masses were asking whether the Galilean prophet was expected to come to the feast. Everywhere the question could be heard, "Where is he?" So widespread his fame had become that there was no need to explain who was meant.

But the popular longing for his presence was spoken in whispers, since the people were well aware of the hatred in which he was held by the Temple leaders. The rulers had made no secret of their contempt for this dangerous innovator from a contemptible little Galilean village.

Thus there was a division among the worshippers at the feast. In many a corner men could be seen in furtive discussion, some holding that the prophet was a good man, others protesting that he was leading their nation astray. There was considerable muttering about him.

The Master himself was nowhere in sight; and rumors were heard that he had been warned by the elders to stay away from the Holy City.

The boisterous annual Harvest Festival was celebrated for a week beginning on the fifteenth day of the month Tishri. The season of gayety and dancing began on the first night when the Temple was seen illuminated by thousands of torches which gave the whole scene a touch of other-worldly beauty. This was the feast which the children and the young loved best of the feasts of the year. It had light, motion and loud clamor.

The thousands who flocked to Jerusalem for the feast built their own little booths of green branches and lived in these primitive tabernacles for the duration of the Feast. There were endless processions through the Temple grounds with the participants carrying their *lulabs* in their right hand and a citrus fruit in their left. Every feast day there was a blaring of trumpets, singing of choruses, and general thanksgiving.

Jews from foreign lands told about pagans having their harvest festivals also, but that these were filled with obscene, wild and drunken orgies. The children of Israel listened in horror to such tales and they praised the Lord for having chosen their people to give Him thanks and praises. They were convinced that the sacred gladness of their own Feast of the Tabernacles was found nowhere else on earth.

The green tabernacles were built in memory of the grace of God to Israel in the desert, when Moses had taken them out of Egyptian bondage to lead them home, forever, to the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The fruit offerings were in honor of God's goodness, which once again had granted his Israel its harvest.

In the middle of the Feast, the Galilean made his sudden appearance in the Temple. With fearless calm he walked

about in the sacred precincts, followed by his twelve apostles. From time to time, as crowds would gather around him, he taught them his glad tidings and exhorted them to make their worship true and pure.

"How is it that this man has learning, having never studied?"

Eyeing the scribes in the crowd, the Master answered:

"My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man will do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I speak of myself . . . Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you prepare to kill me?"

The offended listeners shouted at him, "You have a devil! Who is trying to kill you?"

Paying no attention to their violent protests, he proceeded to defend his use of the Sabbath to heal the sick and the demoniacs.

As other pilgrims recognized him they spoke in loud surprise, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking boldly, and they say nothing to him; Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? Yet we know where this man comes from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where he comes from."

The Master stopped to listen to their confused guessing. His answer was immediate:

"You both do know me, and you also know where I come from."

His challenge startled them.

"But I did not come of myself; he who sent me is true, and him you do not know. But I know him: for I am come from him, and he has sent me."

At that moment, John and the other apostles saw some of the Temple guards moving forward through the crowd, as if they intended to arrest their Master. Observing, however, that the crowd was eagerly listening to his strange teachings, the hesitant guards turned and walked off to report his disturbing presence to their superiors.

As the Master moved on, some who had witnessed his healings, came forward with their own answer to his claim of being heaven-sent or the Messiah, saying, "When Christ appears, will he do more miracles than those which this man has done?"

As the day wore on, it became clear that many of the people believed in him. The chief priests and the Pharisees were told that the muttering, which had started in whispers, was now turning into open acclaim. Without hesitating, the Temple authorities dispatched officers to arrest him.

The arresting guards found him preaching to a great assembly of listeners, lost under his mysterious spell.

"Yet a little longer shall I be with you, and then I go to him who sent me. You shall seek me and shall not find me; where I am you cannot come."

With that statement he closed. Passing calmly by the guards who had come to arrest him, he left the Temple grounds.

When he was gone, the listeners tried to explain to one another what they thought they had heard him say. Their debate was but a jumble of confused guesses, "Where will he go that we shall not find him?"

"Will he go to our compatriots dispersed among the Gentiles and teach the Gentiles?"

"What is this he says, 'You shall seek me and you shall not find me,' and, 'Where I am you cannot come?' "

On the last day of the Feast, the trumpets resounded over the Temple area, as a solemn procession moved through the Water gate, led by a priest carrying a golden pitcher filled with water from the pool of Siloam. The gay, mighty procession progressed through the Temple courts toward the altar where priests stood ready to receive the pitcher with Siloam water to pour it as a sacrifice into the silver basin on the side of the altar. On the opposite side stood a silver basin filled with a wine offering.

The festival crowd, old and young, knew that the water offering was a symbolic, sacrificial prayer of the people of Israel to God, asking for rain for the coming year. The last day of the Feast had arrived. On the previous days of the Feast they had prayed for dew; this morning they prayed for life-giving rain upon their arid land, which except for Galilee and the Jordan Valley, was totally dependent upon water from above.

When the rite of the water sacrifice ended, Jesus, finding a place where he could be seen and heard, cried in a strong and clear voice to the people assembled:

"If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes on me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his life shall flow rivers of living water.' "

The surprised crowd immediately broke into a babble of confused remarks and opinions.

"This is really the prophet."

"This is the Christ."

"Is Christ to come from Galilee?"

"Has not the scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"

This was the strangest Feast of the Tabernacles any man could recall.

The Temple guards had been alerted and ready to arrest him, when he had started his sudden proclamation. His words captivated them to such an extent that they forgot their police assignment. Later, as they reported to the chief priests and Pharisees, they met the astonished outbursts of their angry superiors. "Why did you not bring him?" they demanded. The officers looked the priests straight in the eyes and confessed, "No man ever spoke like this man!"

"Are you also being deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed on him? But this people, that does not know the law, be cursed!"

The hissing words of the priests had barely died away, when a calm voice was heard. It was Nicodemus, one of their own, speaking. "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and learns what he does?"

His surprising plea for legal evidence and fair play was greeted with an instantaneous roar of priestly derision. "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look: no prophet is to arise out of Galilee!"

On this note the tumultuous meeting broke up. Not without fear the fanatic Temple leaders noticed that this disturbing prophet had actually dominated the whole Feast of the Tabernacles.

Most of the rulers left the room, but the chief priests and

their closest advisers remained for a closed session of consultation on strategy. The shocking words of Nicodemus had revealed that even among themselves there were men who seemed to have fallen prey to the guiles of this false Messiah. In fact, quite a few of the Pharisees present had appeared to be in agreement with Nicodemus' approach to the explosive matter. They seemed to be in favor of having the Sanhedrin conduct a formal, orderly hearing for this Galilean imposter. To make things worse, the word was abroad among the festival crowd that perhaps even the authorities were beginning to honor Jesus' claim of being the true Messiah of Israel.

The chief priests surveyed the precarious situation with the cold logic of shrewd reasoning. Being of the Sadducee persuasion they regarded the matter mainly as a problem of politics. Ever since their emissaries had returned from the encounter with the Galilean in the Dalmanutha region, they had been satisfied that this Nazarene was not the Messiah. He had been challenged to give them proof of his Messiahship by a sign from heaven which could not be misunderstood. In answer he had ignored their demand and had refused to give any sign of celestial power. On the contrary, he had spoken some dark words about the "sign of Jonah" and walked away. This had convinced the chief priests once and for all that although this Galilean imposter might have power to heal the sick, his high estimate of himself was but the vain imaginings of a religious fanatic.

His public demonstration today in the Temple showed the chief priests that the Nazarene possessed a diabolic power over the masses. In fact, he might well lead the accursed, ignorant mob into a rash revolt against the Romans. With

the fresh memory of the most recent act of terror committed by Pontius Pilate, the slaughtering of defenseless Galileans at the very altar, they realized quite clearly that the Romans were in no mood for any Messianic nonsense.

Political prudence told the chief priests that the precarious truce between the Temple and the Roman procurator in Caesarea-by-the-Sea could not endure an uprising, which this Galilean seemed both able and ready to launch. A demilitarized Israel was no match for the Roman legions, and a Messianic pretender who did not possess the celestial power of the true Messiah was certainly no new Moses to lead Israel to victory over the Romans.

For these reasons the chief priests readily agreed that the Galilean was a mad dreamer, extremely dangerous to the national security of their people.

"He has a demon!"

"He is a tool in the hands of Beelzebub!"

"We will have to stop him, before he takes our people down the road of blood and destruction."

"He should have been arrested this afternoon."

"Certainly, and he would have been, if those chicken-hearted guards had not disobeyed our order."

"True enough, but you don't seem to fathom that his words have a beguiling power even over rough soldiers. No wonder, then, that the dumb masses are being led astray."

"I suggest that we put him and his flock under *herem*. I am sure that our people will fall into line, the moment they hear that this Nazarene has been excommunicated. He will become as a leper to Israel."

"Excellent, excellent suggestion! We have evidence

against him, more than enough, to sustain such an excommunication."

"Excommunicate both him and his mob. That is what we will do. Such action will be taken in due time. Today, however, our more immediate problem is to get through this Feast of Tabernacles unhurt. My soul dies within me, when I think of the bloodshed in the Temple which might come before nightfall, if Pontius Pilate should suspect another uprising brewing within these sacred precincts."

In full and hearty agreement, the chief priests accordingly decided to check the drift of the crowd toward believing in the Galilean by meeting his every statement with skilled counter-attacks and also by sending abroad the news of his pending excommunication. Finally, if an arrest should become feasible it should be executed without hesitation.

The chief priests and their advisers finally left the hall, moving out into the chill October dusk.

That evening the Feast of the Tabernacles ended in a blaze of illumination from lamps high up on walls and from countless torches held aloft by the crowd. Gay thanksgiving filled the courts, as leading citizens of Jerusalem danced their ceremonial torch dance, eagerly watched by the masses. Thousands of women, standing in the colonnades of the Women's Court, kept gazing with admiring eyes at the impressive scene.

As the ceremonial dance was about to end, the Master and the Twelve reappeared under the golden candelabrae in the Court of the Treasury, strategically located between the Women's Court and the crowd around the dancers. With a loud voice the Master cried out another Messianic proclamation:

"I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

His cry alerted the Pharisees, who immediately realized that the Galilean prophet had applied the Messianic title, "the Light," to himself, claiming the world as his domain. There followed an intense exchange of words between the Master and his Temple adversaries, the latter bent on discrediting his mad claims. Facing the Galilean, the Pharisees shouted so that all could hear, "You are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true!"

Some in the silenced crowd nodded in agreement, since it was accepted practice in Israel that two witnesses were needed to establish legal evidence.

Eyeing his opponents with perfect calm, the Master answered:

"Even though I bear witness of myself, my testimony is true, for I know whence I came and whither I go. You judge after the flesh, I judge no man. Yet if I do judge, my judgment is true, for I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent me."

The perplexed looks of the crowd revealed that they had not grasped the meaning of his strange words, but the Pharisees and the scribes understood clearly that the speaker referred to God as the witness to his claim of being the Messiah.

"Furthermore, it is written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bears witness of myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness of me."

With a cynical sneer the Pharisees broke in with a counter-challenge, "Where is your Father?"

Some of the people laughed at their clever attack, since

every one could see that the second witness was still missing.

"You neither know me nor my Father; if you had known me, you would have known my Father also."

Then, he made as if to depart, but suddenly he halted and cried:

"I go my way, and you shall seek me and shall die in your sins; where I go, you cannot come!"

In the stunned crowd questions arose: "Will he kill himself?"

"You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world."

A loud murmur of resentful remarks met his insulting words.

"I said to you that you shall die in your sin, for if you do not believe that I am he, you shall die in your sins."

The scribes who saw that he was making a clear-cut claim of being the true Messiah immediately challenged him, "Who are you?"

"I am he that I told you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge about you; but he who sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things which I have heard from him."

The Pharisees shook their heads in frustration at his insistence. They were at a loss how to cope with a man so mad and yet so calm. They also felt that once again he had the people in the palm of his hand.

Controlling the whole situation from within, the Master prophesied:

"When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you shall know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but I speak as the Father has taught me. And he who sent me is

with me: the Father has not left me alone, for I always do those things that please him."

As he began slowly to move away, many of the people followed, eager to show their confidence in him. Peter, James and John, walking behind their Lord, remembered the heavenly mountain secret which they shared with him. If he only would show himself in his transfigured glory, this huge crowd would fall down in adoration.

Seeing the many who followed him, the Master halted to encourage them:

"If you continue in my word, then you are in truth my disciples, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

"We are the seed of Abraham, and were never in bondage to any man. How can you say, 'You shall be made free?' "

"Verily, verily, I say to you, whosoever commits sin is a slave of sin. The slave does not abide in the house forever, but the Son abides forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be freed indeed."

"We are the sons of Abraham!"

"I know that you are Abraham's seed; yet you seek to kill me, because my word has no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father, and you do that which you have seen from your father."

"Abraham is our father!"

"If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. You do the deeds of your father."

"We are not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God!"

"If God were your Father, you would love me: for I

proceeded forth and came from God; I came not of myself, but he sent me."

His listeners now understood that the prophet of Galilee demanded to be accepted as God's Messiah. He had placed them in an either-or-situation.

Disbelief and resentment were in their tense faces, as the Lord continued:

"Why do you not understand my speech? It is because you cannot stand to hear my word? You are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning . . . Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?"

The priests and the crowd moved closer shrieking at him, "You are a Samaritan and have a devil!"

"I have not a devil, but I honor my Father, and you do dishonor me . . . Verily, verily I say to you: if a man keeps my word, he shall never see death."

"Now we know that you have a devil. Abraham is dead. The prophets are dead. And you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he shall never taste death.' "

"Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead?"

"And greater than the prophets who are dead?"

"Who are you making yourself?"

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad!"

"You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"

"Verily, verily, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am!"

As his astonishing proclamation rang out, the Lord saw

a cluster of faces hardened by outraged incredulity and hatred.

"Accursed be the blasphemer!"

"Get us stones, stones!"

"Stone the ungodly one!"

In the rising tumult, the Master and his Twelve made their way out of the Temple. The flickering light from the golden candelabrae was dying out in the cold October night.

During the weeks which followed the Feast of the Tabernacles in Jerusalem the apostles regained their equilibrium. The Master led them on an extensive mission journey through Judea, and the Twelve noticed that he had lost none of his power over the masses, as he held forth in the Main Streets of Judean towns and villages, proclaiming the glad tidings of the Kingdom.

The apostles were happy about the change from the atmosphere of the Temple. While the opposition of the Temple rulers had made the Master stand up for heavenly Truth with the uncompromising fire of the prophets, now meeting the Judean masses, he once again turned to the inspiring and endearing preaching of God's loving mercy to the lost and the lonely. Day after day, he was surrounded by multitudes of simple men and women, who seemed not to have heard of what transpired at the Feast of the Tabernacles.

To the Twelve this was an encouraging sign of hope, since they felt that the glowing kindness of their Master kindled in the Judean masses the same positive response as they had seen in the early days at Capernaum. They were convinced that he had come away a victor from the battle with the embittered, ugly Temple rulers. They predicted that he would

soon gather Judea under his spell. When that occurred the chief priests and the Pharisees would find themselves a pitiful minority among a people which followed their Lord with loving admiration.

In this heartening hope the Twelve were strengthened when on several occasions their Master was invited to eat in the houses of Pharisees. This could only mean that these leaders were not afraid of their superiors, once they had left the narrow bigotry of Jerusalem behind. The Twelve also noticed that such high invitations seemed to enhance the standing of their Master with the man in the street.

From time to time, encouraging reports came down from Galilee carried by travelers, who told of how the Master was missed in that region. Every Galilean was looking forward to seeing and hearing him again at the next Passover, when tens of thousands of pilgrims would come to Jerusalem. At such good reports the Twelve would rejoice, discussing the happy prospects of a great reunion with multitudes of Galileans on whom he had put an indelible stamp.

On their journey up and down the Judean region, the Master had found one particular home which had become closer to his heart than any other of the many places where he and his apostles had received hospitable welcome.

In Bethany, a woman named Martha received them in her home. With her sister Mary and her brother Lazarus, she welcomed the Master with bright, warm, innocent gladness. The peaceful rest of that home and its true friendship

had gratified the homeless Master; it afforded all of them a place of retreat and relaxation from the endless demands of this strenuous itinerant mission.

Whenever their little group passed through Bethany, Martha's home became a place of teaching and fellowship. Her sister Mary, being of a contemplative nature, would often sit together with the apostles, lost in listening to the Master's teaching.

One day as he was explaining the Kingdom—Mary sitting with the group—Martha suddenly broke into the session with a distraught, querulous interruption, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve you alone? Tell her therefore to help me."

The Master looked at the eager woman in the kitchen door. With a glance of loving-kindness he answered her, deep seriousness in his voice:

"Martha, Martha, you are full of cares and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful. Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

His admonishing words were followed by a soothing hush in which the listeners conversed with their own thoughts.

After a while, Martha and Mary served the meal.

Some days later, an incident happened which seemed at first to carry with it great promise. As their little group was leaving the village of Bethany, a young man of the ruling class came running after the Master and, kneeling before him, asked, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

The Twelve became engrossed with the appealing scene and watched with approving eagerness. The Master, how-

ever, again made one of those replies which had often made the disciples stand aghast at the sternness with which he seemed to treat even well-intentioned people.

"Why do you call me good? There is no one good but one, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honor your father and mother.' "

Without hesitation, the young man answered, his expression reflecting the candid innocence of a good youth, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth."

Jesus looking upon him, loved him, and said to him:

"One thing you lack: go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, follow me!"

At the last words, the apostles' minds instantly recalled their own experience in Galilee, when the Lord had uttered the very same words to them. They knew the power of his challenge to a young person, a regal call which spoke to a man's whole existence. It made a man's entire future hinge upon a single moment of a decision. A thousand silent times the Twelve had relived that sacred moment in their own lives and wondered at the freedom its compelling necessity had meant.

The young ruler remained kneeling a long time. At length he rose in sad silence and slowly began to move away.

The encounter had ended. The decision was negative.

As the Master stood silently watching the departing young man of wealth, a peculiar sadness filled the hearts of the twelve apostles. Their anxious thoughts were revealed in their young faces as the Master turned and spoke to them:

"How hard it shall be for they that have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

The Master's comment had the tone of a deep sigh and it was obvious that his astonishing words hit home.

"Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

One of the Twelve broke out in an involuntary cry, "Who then can be saved?"

The Lord let his eyes glide around to each one of them. He saw that they were all thinking similar, dismal thoughts. Reading their downcast hearts he answered them in a voice ringing with positive cheerfulness:

"With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

A moment later they were on their way at the brisk pace by which they had traversed so many miles since their journeys with him began at the empty boats by the Lake of Galilee.

Some time later, he was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The house of worship was filled to overflowing by a reverently happy audience, elated by the news he brought them of the Kingdom of Heaven. God's love was poured out into their hungry hearts. They felt as if they were guests at a great banquet rather than listeners in a solemn house of worship. As they listened, they remembered the countless Sabbaths they had kept, obediently presenting themselves before God according to the law of Moses. There had been the reading of the portion of scriptures assigned for the day, telling of some great and strange event in their people's history in those distant days when God was directly guiding the lives of their forefathers. How often they had listened filled with a forlorn longing to live in days such as those of Abraham and Moses, Joshua and David, Elijah and Jeremiah!

Today, however, as the teacher of Nazareth was proclaiming his glad tidings, they felt forlorn no longer. God was no longer far away. He was speaking. He was among them and within them.

The people in the synagogue fixed their eyes on the Nazarene, as his words filled the house with the presence of the Eternal.

Suddenly he stopped and turned to a bent-over, emaciated woman, crippled with arthritis. He called to her:

"Woman you are loosed from your infirmity."

As he laid his hands upon her shoulders, she immediately was made straight. Tears of surprised gladness streaming down her cheeks, she burst out in loud shouts of thanksgiving and praise to God. The glad audience immediately joined in the exuberant praise.

Suddenly an irritated voice rent the joyous air. The ruler of the synagogue, ever careful about the Sabbath rules of the elders, cried out angrily, "There are six days in which men ought to work; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day!"

The irritation in his upbraiding voice revealed his contempt both for the crowd and for the Sabbath-breaking healer. The sterility of his piety was instantly met by an angry muttering of the crowd, which only a moment before had experienced the liberty of God's healing presence. However, before their anger was given a chance to harden into godless bitterness, the Master's voice rang out. With words of formidable directness he challenged the ruler of the synagogue and the watchful elders around him:

"You hypocrite! Does not each of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

The synagogue leaders gave up in shame, as a wild jubilation of holy and human acclaim stormed through the house of God. The Master rejoiced with the people and the apostles. To the Twelve the memory came of similar events in Galilee; they recalled that the Son of Man had proclaimed himself Lord over the Sabbath.

What the jubilant Twelve did not know was the ominous fact that some days earlier, the Great Sanhedrin of the chief priests and the Pharisees had met in secret session and decreed to excommunicate the man from Nazareth and all who dared to believe in him and follow him. The humiliation of their defeat at his hands during the Feast of the Tab-

ernacles had rankled the pride of the Temple rulers. They realized now that only the harshest methods could crush this Nazarene and his foul movement. He was a Sabbath-breaker and a Messianic fraud. He was a blasphemer in spite of all the false humility with which he shrouded himself. He constantly mocked Abraham and his true sons. He bent every effort to break down the sacred traditions of the elders of God's Israel. In fact, he spoke against the Temple and its accepted doctrines.

In the Sanhedrin there had been some protestations in his behalf, but the secret session, by a vast majority, passed the motion to excommunicate him and his followers. The chief priests ordered that the excommunication be kept secret for the time being, until the appropriate moment, when they could trap him to spirit him away from the misguided masses.

As the weeks passed by, the Twelve remained unaware of the excommunication, but they told one another that they noticed a growing undercurrent of resistance and hesitancy in quarters dominated by Pharisees, synagogue rulers and the cautious. Their Master himself seemed oblivious to this faint, new trend, as he quietly continued his daily work. Each early dawn he would walk away on his solitary path to pray alone. Each time he returned with steadfast steps, ready and eager for the day's work. His every moment was filled with goodness and resoluteness, as if he walked according to an invisible plan of which he alone was cognizant.

Years of fellowship with him had taught his followers that his inscrutable peace of soul was not for a single moment touched by the perfidy of his adversaries or by the flattering applause of the multitudes.

One evening as they were at dinner at the house of a

ruler, who belonged to the Pharisees, one of those at table with him turned to the Matser with pious sentimentalism, exclaiming, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

The enthusiastic guest had apparently been carried away by the table talk, which had concerned itself with how the good deeds of men would be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Blinded by his own perfection, the pious man had imagined himself as an honored guest at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the world to come. At hearing his enthusiastic words, the other Pharisees smiled in self-satisfied and happy agreement.

In an instant, their mutual dreamy flights into the resurrection world were suddenly and rudely dispersed by the Master, who began to speak to them in a parable:

"A certain man made a great supper, and invited many; and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one consent began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it. I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them. I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and told his lord these things. Then the master of the house in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind.' And the servant said,

'Lord, it has been done as you ordered, and yet there is room.' And the lord said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you, that none of those men who were bidden shall taste of my supper."

Winter Strikes

15. Up to Jerusalem

WINTER HAD COME.

A cold December sky lowered darkly over the little group making its way through the gate into Jerusalem. The Master had taken his companions away from the busy, outwardly encouraging mission through Judea to go up to the Temple for the Feast of Dedication.

As they marched up through the narrow streets, they saw the home owners throughout the city busy with lighting the festival lamps over their doors. They did so with the proud joy of a fervent national self-consciousness. This was the week of lamps and gayety, which each December returned to commemorate the reconstruction of the Temple two hundred years before by the great national hero Judas Maccabeus, after he had crushed the power of the blasphemous pagan Antiochus Epiphanes.

Ever since the Roman occupation, this particular Feast had taken on a deeper meaning of stubborn even though subdued hope. As they lit the lamps before their homes and throughout the whole Temple area, the Jerusalemites quietly

dreamed of the splendor of the Messianic resurrection which would come one day to the city of Macchabeus, Solomon, and David. The lamp of the hope of Israel burned even in the darkest winter filling the hearts of a longing nation with the joy of anticipation.

The Master and his companions were instantly recognized, since this Feast did not attract a great number of pilgrims to the Temple. For the most part people stayed at home in their own villages and towns throughout the land. This national festival was celebrated throughout the whole country, each settlement resounding with shouts of glad abandon, for the observance of fasting and mourning was expressly banned by the traditions of the elders.

On one of the days of the Feast, the Master was walking in the portico of Solomon in the outer court of the Temple, when some emissaries of the Temple rulers approached him. They had been looking for him and when they discovered his presence in the Temple, they surrounded him and threw a commanding question at him, "How long will you keep us uncertain? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly!"

"I told you, and you did not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me; but you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep."

An expression of angry frustration crossed the faces of the adversaries. Once again, the prophet had avoided their trap. He had refused to make an open claim of being the Christ. Instead he turned to the Twelve and his other friends and declared:

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any one snatch them out of my hand."

At the word "snatch" the emissaries of the chief priests looked at each other with knowing concern. Could it be that somehow the Galilean had gained knowledge of their secret decision to excommunicate him and his followers? Who might have told him?

"My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all, and no man is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

This was rank blasphemy. For a mortal man to identify himself with the Eternal One was a horrendous sin. Such a person must be stoned! With the outraged fury of injured religious people the emissaries began to take up stones to stone him.

The crowd, the Twelve and the adversaries moved closer together around the Master. In the oppressive tension of the next few moments, people began to shout, "He has a demon!"

"He is mad!"

"These are not the sayings of one who has a demon."

"He is possessed!"

"Why listen to him?"

"Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

With a regal look, which made the stones lie still in the white-knuckled hands of his attackers, the Master continued his argument:

"Many good works I have shown you from the Father; for which of these works do you stone me?"

"For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God."

The apostles nodded in silent confession as if they wanted to let the Pharisees understand that they finally had hit the truth concerning the Lord: He was the Son of God.

The Twelve knew the truth and they felt like proclaiming it with all their might, but were constrained by the pledge which he had made them take that day at Caesarea Philippi. How they wished for this unbearable suspense to end. One day it would. Then as the real truth stood revealed before all the world, what would happen to these puny, unbelieving men?

"Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods?' If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?' "

The incredulous scribes glanced furtively at one another, trying to find a counter-argument, when the Master calmly sealed their defeat with a direct challenge:

"If I do the works of my Father, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

Dejected, the scribes let the stones drop out of their hands. In anger they stepped over to some officers of the Temple police standing near by and demanded that the blasphemer be arrested. The guards listened to their fitful pleas with unimpressed patience but shrugged their shoulders and walked away.

As the Master led the Twelve out of the Temple, the apostles beamed with reassurance both at the Master's victory and at the crowd of admiring Jerusalemites, who started to accompany them down through the streets. A sense of security crept over the Twelve when they saw that even in this cold city, the masses believed that the Master was a prophet of truth and power.

He was walking ahead of his apostles across the Kedron valley, up the slopes of Mount Olive. Once again, the Twelve were silently wondering what he might be thinking. They had never learned to understand his way of reasoning. He seemed to see things from the inside.

At the top of a ridge, the Master came to a halt. As he turned, the apostles saw his face shadowed with the same immense sadness which they recalled from the hill above Capernaum. It frightened them.

Suddenly the Master raised a weary hand in the direction of the Temple city which lay bathed in the eery light of a dying December sun:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which kills the prophets and stones them that are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house shall be left desolate. And verily, I say unto you, 'You shall not see me, until the time when you shall say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' "

A few days later they left Judea. Eager to avoid the teeming towns and the curious villages, the Master led the Twelve into a retreat across the Jordan. They returned to Bethany in Perea, the very place where he had first met them during those stirring days, which now seemed so distant in time.

Peter, Andrew and John pointed out to the other apostles how John the Baptist had been standing here surrounded by vast multitudes conquered by his mighty call to repentence. Their eyes glowed with sacred memories of the great awaken-

ing they had witnessed as hundreds of men and women sought new life in the baptism of John.

When Andrew and John later guided their companions to the very spot where John the Baptist had uttered his strange words about Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," all of them felt that here in the wilderness they could still feel and touch the very beginnings of the glorious movement of which they now were a part.

As their conversation lapsed, the Twelve discovered the Master sitting under a large tree which afforded a cool shade against the desert sun. John whispered to his companions that it was the very place where the Master and the Baptist had sat together in long and intimate conversation on that day when the cousins had said farewell never to meet again on earth.

The apostles stood silently looking at their lonely Master. A deep stillness filled the space between them and him. They could now understand why he had chosen to revisit this sacred place where the call had come to him and where the heavenly Voice had first spoken.

The next few weeks were filled with days of a deepened personal fellowship with him beyond anything which the Twelve had ever experienced. In hours of secret intimate teaching he guided their eager young minds into untold mysteries of his life and his person. He pointed to the threatening wilderness beyond them and spoke of his forty days of a life-and-death struggle with the Devil. He recited the Scriptures for them to open their slow but hungry hearts to the true meaning of the work of God to which he had called them.

One evening, as Peter asked him to explain the priestly

contention that the Messiah must come from Bethlehem, he revealed to them the eternal truth of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary and informed them of his mother's sacred but heavy obedience as the handmaiden of the Lord. For the first time, they heard that Caesar Augustus in far-away Rome had ordered that all the world should be enrolled and that Mary, the Virgin, being with child, had gone up to Bethlehem, the home town of those who were of the house and lineage of David. There she gave birth to her firstborn, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.

A regal joy sang in the Lord's voice as he told the Twelve of the miracle of the Incarnation. The eyes of the apostles filled with tears for the beauty of it all. Their souls were transported, as it were, to that holy night at Bethlehem. They felt as if they themselves were present at the manger; they saw the shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock that night, and they sensed how the glory of the Lord shone around them even this very moment.

"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.'And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace,
good will toward men."

As the Christmas story ended, the Lord found himself

surrounded by Twelve young men kneeling before him in reverent, silent adoration.

At length, he gave them his evening blessing:
"Peace be with you. My peace I give to you."

Some days later, they resumed their journey, setting out on a mission pilgrimage throughout the Transjordanian region. The Master found a warm welcome in the towns and villages, for the people had heard of his wonderful works throughout other regions of the land. Many who had been present at the recent Feast of the Tabernacles greeted him with the gladness of recognition.

As the month of January lapsed into February, a steady stream of new arrivals from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem and the Coast proved that his new mission had become nation-wide. Perea had never seen so many people all filled with deep and spontaneous excitement. Even some of the rulers of the synagogues were positively friendly in their attitude.

One day, however, scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem again arrived on the scene of his preaching. His observant eyes immediately caught them as they made their way through the wildly excited crowd. People close by could hear them murmur to one another, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

However, before the Pharisees could begin their impertinent cross-examination of him, the Master launched into a parable, telling of a man who lost one of his one hundred sheep. Leaving the ninety-nine in the wilderness, he went to look for the lost one and kept on searching until he found

it. Returning with the found sheep on his shoulders, he called together his friends and neighbors for a social time of common rejoicing.

"Likewise, I say unto you, there shall be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

The glum Pharisees understood what he meant, but the people looked at the Master with loving approval.

Before he ended his teaching for that day, he told them the strange tale of two brothers:

"A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country, and there he wasted his property with riotous living. And when he had spent all, a mighty famine arose in that land, and he began to be in want. He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his belly with the husks that the swine ate; and no man gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; and am no longer worthy to be called your son: make me as one of your hired servants.'

"And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before

you; and am no longer worthy to be called your son!' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring out the fatted calf, and kill it and let us eat and make merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to be merry.

"Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, neither have I at any time transgressed your commandments; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad: for this your brother was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' "

His listeners among the common people hung on his lips until the very end of the parable. They thought it was the greatest story they had ever heard and they turned their faces toward heaven as if they now knew who God really was. Then they went home to tell their kinsmen the parable. Yet when the sun set in the Perean sky that evening none of those who had heard the story realized that it was a parable that would be told and retold—to the end of time.

One day, as he was teaching in another Transjordanian village, a message was brought to him that Lazarus, his close friend, was critically ill. The tender way in which he inquired about all the facts from the messenger who brought the news showed how deeply the Master loved Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. The apostles and the messenger, therefore, expected him to make an immediate departure from Perea, crossing the Jordan in order to reach the sick friend at the earliest possible moment.

To the Twelve this emergency message from Bethany came at an inopportune time, since they were convinced that the past weeks had been not only a period of retreat and sharing as never before, but was also turning into a season of unsurpassed success of the Master's public ministry.

They felt a secret relief, therefore, when the Master, while keeping his decision to himself, did not hurry to follow the messenger back to Bethany.

Two full days passed, during which the apostles could not detect the slightest trace of change in the Master's calm and patient handling of the needs of the thronging multitude, which by now included men and women from every corner of the land.

Toward sunset of the second day, he suddenly announced his decision:

"Let us go into Judea again."

Their faces fell, as they answered, "Rabbi, the Jews were but recently seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"

Fear and anxiety mingled in their voices, as they moved closer to him.

"Are there not twelve hours in the day?" he asked them.

They gazed at him with an empty expression.

"If any man walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if a man walks in the night, he stumbles, because there is no light in him."

They dared not ask what he meant, but they all recalled that he had spoken in exactly this vein during the recent Feast of the Dedication in Jerusalem. Presently he halted, saying:

"Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep."

"Lord, if he sleeps, he will be well."

"Lazarus is dead!"

The apostles froze with shock and wonder, as the Master continued.

"And I am glad for your sake that I was not there, so that you may believe. Nevertheless, let us go to him."

Peter felt like issuing another warning to the Lord, but he kept his eager tongue. He remembered too well the Master's flaming words to him at Caesarea Philippi.

Suddenly the tired voice of Thomas broke the silence, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Later in the day their group recrossed the Jordan, making their way through a Judea touched by the first signs of budding spring. After two days they arrived at Bethany.

The Twelve realized only too well that the unexpected death of Lazarus had brought them close to the center of the enemy's power. Yet they had not failed to notice the confident determination with which the Master had led them on this forced march. They now understood how deeply he must have loved Lazarus and some of them had been thinking of Nain and the daughter of Jairus. The Lord's incom-

prehensible power over death both frightened and gladdened their hearts.

As their little group halted near the house Martha came rushing to meet the Master, deep signs of agonizing sorrow showing in her face.

"Lord! If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

The Master greeted her despair with a word of infinite tenderness:

"Your brother shall rise again."

"Yes, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Her words came with the nervous rapidity of a believer who knew her theology by heart but had found no consolation in her knowledge of such things in the face of the overwhelming semi-darkness of an immense future.

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

A smile of definite assurance filled her face, as she gave him the answer, which his hopeful words had given to her own stormy heart, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world."

The next moment she rushed back to the house, to summon her sister Mary, "The Master has come, and is calling for you."

As the two mourning sisters came out of the house, the group of gathered mourners imagined that they were going out to wail at the grave, and they started to follow after them, only to find that Martha and Mary were turning down the street in the wrong direction. Presently they saw Mary

rushing forward to the Lord, her sobbing cries of anguish echoing against the walls of the houses. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." At her words, a murmur of remarks arose among the mourners.

"It's the prophet!"

"It's the friend of Lazarus."

"Could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind have caused that even this man should not have died?"

A few moments later, the Master followed by the apostles, the bereaved sisters and their friends arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone at the opening. As he came to a stop, a hush of sacred stillness fell upon all.

Jesus wept.

His weeping deepened the stillness with the weight of eternity.

Someone whispered, "See how he loved him."

With measured, steady steps the Lord walked to the tomb. Deeply moved, he gave his orders to the apostles:

"Take away the stone!"

At that word, Martha, horror in her voice, cried, "Lord, by this time he stinks, for he has been dead four days."

"Did I not say to you that if you would believe you should see the glory of God?"

As the heavy stone was loosened and removed, Jesus lifted up his eyes and prayed:

"Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this for the sake of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me."

Then, facing the tomb, he cried out an otherworldly command which none of them was ever to forget:

"Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, his face wrapped with a cloth.

A wave of speechless awe shook the people; some hid their heads in their hands, others cried for joy. Mary and Martha were kneeling before the Lord in silent adoration. At length he spoke in a calm, practical voice:

"Loose him, and let him go!"

Within a few minutes the news of the resurrection of Lazarus reached Jerusalem, throwing its citizens into excited awe and alarming the Temple rulers into emergency action.

The same day, a council meeting was called with many members of the Sanhedrin present. The Master had shocked them into confusion and panic. The council chambers echoed with shrill voices of scared, helpless men, bombarding one another with questions and comments.

"What are we to do?"

"He must be stopped at once."

"If we let him go on in this manner, every one will believe in him."

"And how will you stop him?"

"This man continues to perform signs wherever he goes."

"He is winning new followers every day. His mission in Perea was a huge success, if we are to believe our informants."

"Imagine what the Romans might do."

"They will come to destroy both our holy place and our nation."

"This traitor will not stop before there is a blood bath."

"He has a demon!"

Shrewd and unperturbed Caiphas sat in the high seat of high priest, listening to the alarmed, incoherent noises from his panicky councilmen. Such people call themselves leaders of our nation, he mused, as a cynical smile crossed his old, hard face.

At length he called for silence.

"You know nothing at all," he began, eyeing the influential audience with the frigid overbearance of a leader who from years' experience had learned how to cope with dangerous situations.

"You know nothing at all," he continued with cynical determination, "nor do you grasp that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."

His courageous solution struck his listeners as a correct and necessary suggestion. The logic of national survival demanded a harsh, swift end to the threat facing the Temple and their nation. Thus, from that day on they took counsel about how to put this Galilean to death. Orders were given to track him down and to have him arrested.

He had suddenly vanished again.

Weeks went by, before a verified report of his whereabouts reached the Temple rulers. It proved that he had gone into retreat in the wilderness near Ephraim north of Jerusalem.

For the time being the chief priests and the Pharisees decided to let his case rest. They were busy with more urgent things, for they were preparing for the high feast of Passover, when hundreds of thousands of the faithful would come to worship God in His Holy Temple.

For several days the apostles had observed the dust rising

from the Passover caravans moving in from the north. From their retreat in the wilderness near Ephraim they watched this sign of the approach of the high holiday and wondered whether the Master intended to go to the Temple during this Passover. As yet, he had uttered no word about his plans, but the apostles had noticed that he stayed away longer than usual, when he left them for his lonely sessions of prayer.

Most of the crowds had now gone away, eager to get back to their homes in order to prepare for the journey to the Passover feast.

Among themselves, the apostles concluded that the Master most certainly would be going up to this feast, which would gather devout Jews from all the Dispersion. No feast could compare with the Passover in immensity of attendance. At this great feast of Israel, the Lord would meet the faithful from all the world.

But he kept their anxious hearts in suspense. Time was moving along so fast that they would have to move soon, if they were to reach Jerusalem in time for the Feast. John and Peter reminded the more impatient apostles that experience had shown them that the Lord could never be rushed. He had his own time and never proceeded except upon clear orders of his heavenly Father.

So they all waited.

One early dawn, he announced that they were going to the Passover. Watching their excited relief at the news, he started down the road at a tempo which reminded the Twelve of a soldier's march. They immediately fell in with his strong, fast pace, which gave them an invigorating feeling of being participants in a mission of more than usual impor-

tance. A thousand thoughts and emotions drifted through their hearts as they followed him, hour after hour.

As they passed through the villages, Jerusalem-bound pilgrims recognized him and made strenuous efforts to keep up with his little group. They thought it would be an added attraction to arrive for the Passover in the company of him, whom their people called "The Son of David." Some of the pilgrims had witnessed his healings of the sick in Transjordania where he had been working God's miracles. Today he seemed so different, as if he were absorbed in matters of grave concern to his whole cause.

Just as they approached the crossing where the road linked up with the main highway running south from Galilee to Jericho, the Lord suddenly waved the Twelve aside from the pilgrim caravan, taking them aside into the fields now blooming with April flowers.

When they reached the privacy of a little hill, he seated himself on a stone, as the Twelve gathered around him in a close semi-circle. Looking at them with his clear, inquiring eyes, he addressed them in a firm, moving voice:

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and the third day he shall rise again."

He stood up, giving the Twelve to understand that he was not going to say anything more. In the bright April sun his face had an intense expression of sadness mixed with victorious assurance. The birds were singing above the fields. As the distant chant of the pilgrim crowd floated in on a soft afternoon breeze, Peter, John, Thomas, Judas, Andrew and

the others turned to stare at one another. In a long, wordless silence they were trying to grasp what they had just heard him say. In their feverish minds pictures of the chief priests, the Romans, and a cross clashed with lovely memories of his great works and his vast goodness. True enough, this was now the third time he had spoken to them in private in this mysterious vein. Yet, here, on the way to the Passover, where everybody would hail him and protect him against his enemies, his somber words seemed downright meaningless. The apostles remained standing in awkward silence until the Master's friendly voice bid them resume the pilgrimage. They followed him immediately, only too happy to get back again to the mile-long caravan, winding its way down toward Jericho.

At a turn in the road, the lovely town of Jericho came into sight. It lay as a deep, green oasis against the brown, lifeless desert stretching toward the east. The fields around Jericho were fed by clear streams, which made the city beloved by all travelers. For centuries this city of roses and date palms had been a stopping place for the Passover crowds to refresh themselves before beginning their weary ascent of the three thousand feet climb to the Temple of Jerusalem.

As the Master came close to the city, he found himself the center of attraction in a multitude of admiring pilgrims, many of them from Galilee. Those walking before him kept turning to catch a glimpse of the famous man; those following behind him kept pressing so close to him that they formed a packed mass of men, women and children. All of them supposed that the Kingdom of God was near at hand. They were grateful beyond words that Divine Providence

had willed for them to be so close to him. Their simple faces shone with the humble gladness of innocent admiration.

Word of his approach had reached Jericho long before his entry. Main Street was packed, every foot, with jubilant, excited people telling one another of miraculous deeds the approaching prophet had done. The street which was famed for its great trading had now turned into a great religious news center.

As he appeared at the city gate, he was given a tumultuous welcome, "Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed be the throne of David."

"Hosannah! Hosannah in the highest!"

As he made his way, step by step, through the ebullient ecstasy of the throng, the Twelve moved in closer around him on either side in order to protect him.

Suddenly he halted. A hush of feverish expectancy surged through the crowd. They saw the prophet looking toward a sycamore tree. Behold, up there sat that wicked little man, Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector. A wild sneer arose against the excommunicated one from the annoyed masses.

Then the prophet spoke, his voice loud for all to hear:

"Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today!"

A deadening silence fell over the packed Main Street. No one stirred, except Zacchaeus who with swift movements climbed down, his face shining with glad surprise. Stepping

in front of the Master, Zacchaeus assured the prophet with joy that he would be a most welcome guest.

The next moment jeers and indignant murmurs stormed through the bewildered crowd. On every side, the apostles heard, "He is going to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." The insanity of it all! The crowd shook their heads, punctuating their murmurs with the wild gesticulations of angry people.

Zacchaeus faced the Master and said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

His public promise of a restitution so far beyond the maximum requirements of the law, took the masses by surprise. They had never expected to see this wicked man change his evil ways; now they ceased shouting.

Immediately, the Master's voice again rang out over the throng:

"Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

With that proclamation, he accompanied Zacchaeus to the latter's palatial home in the wealthy section of the city.

The citizens of Jericho gathered at the evening meal in their homes kept on discussing the incredible events of the day, until late hours. Some were honestly disgusted; but most seemed to approve the action of the Galilean prophet. Perhaps the former had forgotten that the Book contained some very strong words about God's mercy to those who repent.

The next morning, the pilgrims were ready to march on at an early hour, when the Master and the Twelve came out to them from the house of Zacchaeus. In a moment, the caravan was leaving Jericho behind through the Jerusalem gate, where Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

Hearing the manifold noise of the moving crowd, he inquired what great person was causing all this commotion. They told him, "It is the prophet. It is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David."

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," he cried in a loud voice. Someone told him to keep quiet, but he cried with more violent eagerness, "Jesus, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped, turned to his apostles and ordered:
"Call him."

Two of the apostles immediately rushed over to Bartimaeus still seated by the roadside. Greeting him, they said, "Be of good cheer; rise, he is calling you." Throwing off his mantle the bling beggar sprang up and came to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?"

"Master, let me receive my sight."

"Go your way; your faith has made you whole."

Immediately he received his sight; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

Bartimaeus, turning to see the countless Passover pilgrims, smiled at the glorious sight of God's people. Joining the caravan, he decided to walk right among the apostles.

Peter took the happy beggar's arm. By nightfall they would be in Bethany to stay with Lazarus and his sisters. "Walking from miracle to miracle," Peter mused, as the caravan passed the last houses in Jericho.

A soft April dusk was wrapping up the little village for the night as Passover pilgrims from the north halted in Bethany. Behind them lay the steep highway now fast disappearing in the nocturnal darkness which made the region north and east appear as if it were a vast ocean, timeless and still.

The Master and the Twelve walked down Bethany's Main Street to the house of Martha.

The following days were filled with the tramping of pilgrims from Jerusalem coming to Bethany to see the prophet. He had already filled the Passover multitudes in Jerusalem with an intense curiosity about himself and his work. In the inns there were endless rumors about what he had done in Judea, Perea and Galilee. The pilgrims were convinced that God was visiting His people. If anyone expressed doubts, he was simply challenged to go across Mount Olive to Bethany where he could see Lazarus, whom the Lord had raised from the dead.

The Twelve sensed that the Master did not approve of the boisterous curiosity of the Passover crowds who day after day kept milling around on the Main Street of Bethany. Yet, he had no choice. He was actually hemmed in; there was no place to which he could now retreat from the masses.

As the busy week went by the Twelve became convinced that their Master's popularity was at its peak nationally, since people from every region came to praise him. His years of

infinite kindness had captivated the people so deeply that no power on earth could now drive a wedge between him and the multitudes.

When the week in Bethany ended, the Twelve were full of confident hope, looking forward to the great days ahead in Jerusalem. This would be a Passover to remember.

The Sabbath came. Quiet, sacred peace filled the village. Martha and Mary made a supper for him and his companions with Lazarus in the seat of the host. The meal passed in quiet conversation on things that pertained to the holy season and to the new Kingdom of God. Everyone present was delighted to share this quiet family fellowship after the incessant demands of the busy week, packed with the visits of hundreds of curious people whom they had never seen before.

During the supper Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of the Master. The house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.

All present could see how deeply the Master appreciated this sudden honor and the thoughtful love behind it. But suddenly the beauty of the moment was shattered by a biting exclamation from Judas Iscariot, the treasurer, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred *denarii* and given to the poor?"

The whole company turned to Judas with unconcealed anger in their eyes, but the Lord fixed his loving gaze on Mary and said:

"Let her alone. She has been keeping it for the day of

my burial. The poor you always have with you, but me you have not always."

As he finished his hidden prophecy, his clear eyes sought the whole round of perplexed faces. He realized that not one of them had grasped that this was the last Sabbath he would share with them.

Crushed on The Cross

16. The King of Truth

THE NEXT DAY, refreshed by the rest of the Sabbath, the Master and the Twelve left Bethany for Jerusalem.

Lazarus, Mary, Martha and many other believing friends joined them, followed by a great many of the young people of the village. The solemn joy of Passover expressed itself as they sang the ancient songs of Ascents.

Half an hour later, as they were approaching Bethphage, a suburb of the Holy City, the Master made the group halt. He called two of his apostles to him, ordering them to go into the village, while He himself waited.

A few minutes later, the two men reappeared, leading a colt of an ass to the Master. To the astonishment of all, the Lord ordered the humble animal decked with a garment for an improvised saddle. One of the apostles immediately threw his mantle across the back of the colt and the Lord sat himself upon the animal, which was to carry him into the great feast.

Walking in two lines on either side of the colt, the Twelve wondered what this strange act might symbolize. It was the first time they had seen their Master ride. As they watched

him, sitting young and erect, his white robe shining in the spring sun, they recalled that the donkey from times immemorial had been the peaceful carrier of great men. Filled with a sudden assurance that the Master had ordered this to happen for a higher purpose, the apostles, therefore, raised their strong young voices in the Hallel of the pilgrims' song,

"Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord!
We bless you from the house of the Lord."

Thus singing, joined by the rest of the crowd, they passed through Bethphage, as the villagers came running into Main Street to stare in wonder at the procession. Children and young people milled around the man on the donkey. He was the famous prophet of Galilee. With jubilant voices they greeted him and followed in his train down the street.

On a ridge outside the village, the Master again halted his followers, as he saw a great crowd suddenly approaching from the direction of Jerusalem. At the sight of the mounted Lord the Jerusalemites raised an ecstatic shout of happy surprise. Then, changing their walk into running, they rushed to pay their homage. In a minute, the two groups had melted into one great joyous mass of hundreds of men, women and children.

The Jerusalemites reported that tens of thousands of Passover pilgrims, who had already arrived in the Holy City, were asking about the Master and that all were hoping that he would come to the Feast. The Twelve received this heartening news with joyful anticipation of a warm welcome for their Lord. They thought it was really a magnificent coincidence that the Lord had decided to enter Jerusalem today in such a signal manner. It would be a public entry which neither the chief priests nor the people could ignore.

Someone passed the word along in the friendly crowd that they should make the most of their jubilant demonstration for the Master. They must let Jerusalem understand that the Lord had a great and loyal following.

As the procession advanced, the crowd which had come out from Jerusalem marched in front, while the people from Bethany and Bethphage followed the rider on the donkey. Hundreds of Galilean pilgrims also had now caught up with them and marched with Hallel-singing at the rear of the impressive caravan. Suddenly some enterprising youngsters began to cut branches of the trees and, wildly swinging their palms, they shouted at the top of their young voices.

Presently, the procession arrived on the brow of a hill affording a full view of Jerusalem itself, with its imposing temple, walls, fortress and palaces.

As the Master halted the caravan, the singing ceased in a sudden silence of awe; every eye was directed at the splendor and strength of their national shrine-capital. Pride and adoration filled the countenance of all as the visible mystery of God's people of Israel overwhelmed their hearts. This was the dwelling of God Most High.

Jesus wept.

Tears running down his face, he spoke in a warm, choking voice:

"Jerusalem! Would that you knew even on this your day the things that make for your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies shall cast up a trench about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and shall lay you even with the ground, you and your children within you, and they

shall not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

The crowd around him froze in the sunny day. The next moment, their silence deepened into paralyzing fear. Some serious minds struggled hard to formulate thoughts of a future day when, according to the Lord's word, all this glory now before their eyes should be nothing but a heap of bloody ruins. They did not succeed. The magnificent sight across the valley was too real and too dazzling. Their strongest imagination could not destroy it; it seemed as though the white colonnades of marble around the Temple reached like praying arms into heaven itself.

At length, the procession continued on its way, descending the western slopes of the Mount of Olives to the level of the valley. Only when new crowds came out of Jerusalem to welcome them did their happy Hallels begin again. The thoughtless and the young soon forgot the prophecy which they had heard the Master utter on the Mount of Olives. With the serious-minded, however, his dire prediction lingered, making their Hallel-singing more of a protesting determination than the expression of spontaneous gladness.

As the Lord rode up toward the city gate, the whole multitude was praising God with a loud voice, "Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" The swelling shout echoed against the mighty tall city walls reaching, as it were, into the endless blue sky.

As the procession was about to march in through the golden gate, some Pharisees suddenly stepped in front of the donkey and, halting the train, said to the Lord, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples."

Gazing at the adversaries with calm eyes and pointing

toward the walls of the city, the Lord cried out loudly for the multitudes to hear:

"I tell you, if these were silent, those very stones would cry out!"

High above the resulting tumult, some Roman soldiers had been watching the strange procession from the colonnade. Their cohorts had been alerted to report any sign of disturbance which might occur during the coming Passover. They had been informed that the Jewish chief priests had warned the Roman authorities that some rebels might avail themselves of the occasion of the Feast to create trouble.

As the soldiers now looked down on the great crowd around the man on the donkey they reassured themselves that it was harmless. The man did not even ride a horse! Thereupon they began to glory in stories of the really great parades of Rome, hundreds of thousands strong. There one could see victorious generals leading their shining troops in triumph into a city which was the ruler of the whole world! They joined in a scornful roar of raw laughter as one of them mocked at the pitiful exaggeration which seemed to be a trait of these Jewish priests, some of whom were now standing at a distance in the Temple colonnades.

At the news of the approach of the Galilean's strange procession, priests and scribes had rushed to a place where they could get a view of the dangerous prophet as his train descended the Mount of Olives.

They were uneasy at heart, since this was the first time the Nazarene had made a point of his coming to the city. At earlier feasts he had always arrived by stealth almost as though he detested public acclaim. Today, however, his defiance had moved him to make his entry a public demonstra-

tion. As the priests discussed the ominous event, their voices low and disturbed, they would, from time to time, turn their eyes to see if the Roman soldiers at a distance had understood that this was a threat even to Rome.

"It is at least a good thing to know that Pontius Pilate's cohorts have been alerted to anything which this madman and his followers may try to start."

"But what do you really make of this donkey procession?" a young Pharisee inquired, directing his question to an old scribe, famous for his scholarship.

The scholar with the flowing, white beard turned to answer the young inquirer. As the rest of the priests moved closer, he answered in the detached manner of a learned man, "Perhaps this is what is written of old, in the prophet Zechariah:

> "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
> Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
> Behold, your king comes to you;
> he is righteous and brings salvation;
> humble and riding on an ass,
> on a colt the foal of an ass."

The scholar had recited the Zechariah prophecy with the quiet objectivity of a man whose long years with the Holy Scriptures had made him oblivious of cares and disturbances in the petty affairs of men. But he could not help noticing that the prophecy struck his listeners with panic.

At that moment the noise of a great stir in the outer courts rang through the Temple colonnades. Leaving the scholar, the Pharisees rushed to investigate. As he turned, the old man discovered that the Roman soldiers also were disappearing in the direction of the tumult.

In the outer courts, the Master stood surrounded by a

wildly cheering crowd. Most of the Passover pilgrims knew by now that this was the prophet, but some men from distant lands kept asking, "Who is this?" In answer the crowds screamed, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee." Before long they were bringing to him the blind and the lame for healing, and the outer courts were soon jammed with a throng of ecstatic people, praising God and shouting exclamations of surprise at his powerful deeds.

The frightened Pharisees and scribes watching the mad spectacle from the safety of the balustrades realized that the prophet could no longer be stopped. In their panic they sent messengers to the Temple rulers, saying, "Look, the world has gone after him! It is hopeless! You cannot do anything!"

The captain of the Roman cohorts also surveyed the threatening situation, making inquiries through his informers about the real meaning of the riotous joy of the immense crowds around the calm man in the white robe. The intelligence squad returned with the heartening information that neither swords nor sticks were visible anywhere in the crowds. They were simply enjoying a moment of religious abandon, and there was nothing for the Romans to be frightened about. The captain received this news with a sense of relief and satisfaction and relaxed to view the impressive spectacle.

Down in the outer courts, Philip and Andrew ushered a party of Greek pilgrims through the jostling, yelling masses. Finally they reached the Master and presented the Greeks to him as new friends from afar, who wanted to meet him in

person. As he greeted the Greek proselytes, a silence ensued among the people closest to the Lord and spread through the crowd until the whole outer courts were quiet.

Then the Master spoke:

"The hour has come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say to you, except a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit."

The surprised multitude listened to his Galilean dialect carrying the mysterious message. They shook their heads in incomprehension, startled at the strangely changed expression on the face of their hero. His eyes were lifted toward heaven.

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour,' but for this cause I have come to his hour. Father, glorify thy name."

At that word, a thunderous knell clapped against the Temple walls and its echoes rolled on into the inner courts where the burnt offering was being sacrificed. At the terrific sound, the panic-stricken people burst out in startled cries:

"What was that?"

"It was thunder!"

"No, it was the voice of the angel of the Lord!"

"Did you hear the words?"

"Yes, they were, 'I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' "

As the murmurs subsided, the Lord cried out:

"This voice did not come for my sake, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

A wild, jubilant roar arose from the crowd at his pre-

diction that the ruler of the world, the Emperor, was about to be cast down. That must mean that their own Messiah would be lifted up on His Throne forever. People fell on their knees in ecstatic tribute to the new King of Israel. Others cried with loud voices the words of the Hallel:

"The Lord is God, and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar."

"To the Altar!"

"The Altar!"

"Blessed be the Lord. Thou art my God, and I will give thanks to thee!"

The palms waved wildly over the stirring multitude, ready to march their popular prophet to the Altar, when some scribes interfered, asking him another question, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ abides forever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?"

The Master raised his arm to quiet the multitude.

"Yet a little while the Light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtakes you. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become the children of the light."

As if inspired, the children and young people around him abruptly intoned in swelling unison, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna!" The next moment, the children's shout was caught up by the whole crowd, bent upon paying tribute to their Messianic King.

Some chief priests suddenly arrived on the scene, marching with ill-concealed anger toward the prophet. Pointing

accusing fingers at the children, they demanded, "Do you hear what these are saying?"

Jesus said to them:

"Yes. Have you never read,

'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings
thou hast brought perfect praise'?"

With these words the Master turned and walked out of the crowded Temple court, the Twelve following him.

A little later, the priests and the Pharisees, standing in satisfied victory in the colonnades, saw him making his way up the steep incline of the Mount of Olives.

One of his disciples was urging a recalcitrant donkey up the hill.

The next morning, the gates of the Temple were barely opened, when the Master appeared and immediately set to work teaching the people the glad news of the kingdom. With an eagerness born of spiritual hunger and human curiosity, the multitude received his words with astonished admiration of the newness of his message. Many of the Passover pilgrims had never heard or seen him before.

Devout men from Rome, Alexandria, Phrygia, Ephesus and other distant regions kept pressing forward to catch the words of his Galilean dialect so as to be certain that nothing of his strange and uplifting gospel would be lost to their ears.

A sea of glad faces surrounded him as representatives of the supreme Sanhedrin arrived on the scene. Insulted by his fearless conquest of the Passover pilgrims, they rushed forward and interrupted his preaching with a dour challenge, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority?"

The Lord turned to the chief priests and the scribes and answered them with a regal calmness which made them feel stripped in front of the masses.

"I will ask you a question: If you answer me, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things."

He stopped for a moment to let the intense murmur of the people abate.

"Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men? Answer me!"

The priests and the scribes reeled under the impact of his surprise counterattack. Closing up into a whispering huddle, they discussed his dangerous question among themselves. Those nearest the priests could hear them suggest, "If we answer, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you

not believe him.' And if we say 'From men?' No, we dare not say that. The people will stone us, for they are convinced that John was a real prophet." Their discussion concluded in an awkward silence. As they faced the waiting masses, an expression of angry embarrassment crossed their brows.

At length, a scribe answered, "We do not know!"

"Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

The surge of an admiring satisfaction was just gathering momentum among the crowd, when the Lord turned to the pilgrim multitudes and forcefully recounted this parable:

"A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a pit for the wine press, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a distant country. When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, to receive the fruit of the vineyard. And they took his servants, some they beat, others they killed and yet others they stoned. Again he sent to them other servants, more than the first, but they treated them in the same manner . . . Finally he sent his Son to them saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and let us seize the inheritance.' And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him."

The Master halted for a brief moment, scrutinizing the rapt crowd in front of him. Directing his question at the people, he asked them with moral assurance in his clear voice:

"When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

A roar arose from the crowd, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men . . . He will let out the vineyard to other

husbandmen who shall give him the fruits in their seasons!"

Looking straight at the Temple rulers, Jesus said:

"Have you never read in the scriptures:

'The very stone which the builders rejected
has become the head of the corner;
this is the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.'?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it!"

As he finished, the priests and the scribes knew that he had sat in judgment over them before the whole Passover assembly. They scoffed at him and ordered the Temple guards standing near by to arrest the mad destroyer of authority in Israel.

The guards took one look at the situation, before they informed their superiors that an arrest was completely out of the question. The crowd was too friendly and too huge.

With the chagrin of their new defeat showing in their ashen faces the chief priests and the scribes marched off toward the Court of the Priests. The traditions of the elders gave them absolute power over all Temple issues and yet this Galilean had insolence enough to make them defendants in their own house. Also, the prophet's unquestionable power over the stupid and misled multitudes had prevented the direct action which they had agreed upon as necessary for insuring an orderly, peaceful Passover. In fact, time for preventive action was running short. Pontius Pilate had already arrived in the Antonia from his palace in Caesarea-by-the-Sea.

Later in the day the chief priests called a council meet-

ing of such members of the Sanhedrin as could be found on the Temple premises. The emergency session was hectic and full of nervous suggestions for drastic action against the Galilean rebel. At length the Sanhedrin decided to send a group of Pharisees to trap the prophet. Feigning sincerity, these picked delegates would try to get him to utter some dangerous statement on the strength of which he could be delivered up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor himself.

Accepting this delicate but delightful assignment, the Pharisees took counsel on how to entangle the Nazarene. Being far more skilled in theological matters than the secularized Temple rulers, the Pharisees gleefully determined that they would manage to confront the Galilean with a question so clever that he would not be able to extricate himself from it. After a lengthy scholastic discussion they agreed on having contrived exactly the kind of question which the situation called for. It related both to religion and to the authority of the Romans.

Much to their disappointment, a messenger just then arrived to inform them that the Galilean had left the Temple for the day and was already crossing the Kedron valley on his way to his lodging in Bethany.

The next moment, however, they all felt reassured when one of the scribes predicted that the stubborn man from Nazareth would certainly return in the morning.

Tuesday morning, the Passover crowd had eagerly awaited his arrival, when the Lord walked into the Temple

court. Again he was surrounded by the Twelve and a number of friends from Bethany and Capernaum, quite a few of them women. He immediately set about teaching the assembled pilgrims.

Suddenly he noticed a group of Pharisees and Herodians walking together toward him with firm, measured strides. Their appearance was greeted by an immediate murmur of resentment from the crowd listening to the Master's teaching.

With polite smiles on their hypocritical faces, the Pharisees moved close to the speaker and addressed him, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God in truth; neither do you care for any man; for you do not regard the person of men."

Many of the assembly broke out in broad smiles, silently assuring themselves that the most wonderful thing was about to happen. The men of learning were apparently getting ready to join forces with the wonder-prophet from Galilee!

The Master and his apostles remained in cold silence.

"Tell us, therefore," the unctuous voice of one of the Pharisees continued, "what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

The gasping crowd saw a glance of holy indignation fill the Lord's eyes as he immediately answered:

"Why do you tempt me, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax."

The perplexed Pharisees began a frantic search for one of the silver coins used by the Temple authorities in their exchange of foreign currency, when dealing with the Romans. Presently one of the Pharisees handed the Master a small silver coin. Holding the coin in his hand the Lord silently read the superscription around the effigy of Tiberius Claud-

ius Nero, Caesar Augustus. Pointing at the Roman coin he asked his adversaries:

"Whose image and inscription is this?"

With a sheepish look they answered, "Caesar's."

"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The defeated Pharisees marveled at the skillful answer. They hated him, but somewhere in their educated minds their unwilling admiration of a true genius momentarily conquered their contempt. The next instant, their wordless admiration disappeared, covered by the inner darkness of a narrow pride. Hurriedly they turned their backs on their calm conqueror and made off to try to fathom what had gone wrong.

Later the same day, a delegation from the Sadducees came to tempt him. The news of the miserable defeat the Pharisees had sustained at the prophet's hands had whetted the appetite of the cynical Sadducees, who were known among the Jews as rationalists rejecting all scriptures and traditions except the first five books of Moses. To the devout the Sadducees were obnoxious agnostics who denied both prophecy and the resurrection of the dead.

The crowd around the Nazarene saw the cynical glee of the Sadducees, as they started to test the prophet by quoting to him, "Master, Moses said, 'If a man dies, having no children, his brother must marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother.' "

The Lord listened and nodded in agreement. The inquirers were quoting the scriptures correctly enough.

Then their spokesman continued, his voice almost hilarious, "Now there were with us seven brothers; the first

married, and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second and third, unto the seventh. And last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her."

The Twelve could see how the blasphemous impertinence of the Sadducees angered the devout men and women who had come to the Passover feast to worship the God of Israel. Their simple faces reflected their honest contempt.

Then Jesus answered:

"You err, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven.

"And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' God is not God of the dead, but of the living."

As fervent cries of "Amen, Amen" rose from the astonished but admiring multitudes, the conquered Sadducees rushed away leaving the Master free to continue his teaching.

The afternoon sun was filling the vast Temple area with a mysterious iridescence of soft light tones, as the Lord concluded his teaching for the day. After the Sadducees had left, still another skirmish had taken place, when a Pharisee lawyer had appeared to inquire of him which was the greatest commandment in the law. The inquirer was told to love God and practice mercy.

Abruptly the Master addressed a question of his own to the ever present, spying Pharisees: "What do you think of Christ? Whose son is he?"

"The son of David."

"How can then David, in the Holy Spirit, call him Lord, saying,

'The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit on my right hand,
till I make thy enemies thy footstool?'

"If David then calls him Lord; how is he his son?"

While the Passover multitudes waited in vain for an answer from the learned scribes and Pharisees, the apostles readily remembered Bethlehem, the city of David, and the angelic chorus. How often had not the Lord told these people that here was someone greater than Moses, Abraham and the prophets! Yet, the Pharisees now as always refused to receive his word. Again they stood here before him whom God had sent and yet their studied silence only proved their refusal to accept the One who is to sit on the throne of David as Lord forever. The Twelve eyed the Pharisees and shook their heads.

With the stern frankness of prophetic indignation the Lord cried out to the scribes and the Pharisees standing in a threatening mass before him:

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You like to go about in long robes, and receive salutations in the market places and the chief seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, and be called 'Rabbi, Rabbi' . . . You devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you shall receive the greater condemnation.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Verily, I say to you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the

way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the publicans and the harlots believed him; but you, even when you had seen it, you did not afterward repent that you might believe him.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees! For you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for neither do you enter yourselves, nor do you allow those who would enter to go in."

Without waiting for any reaction on the part of the religious leaders of Israel, the Lord made his way out of the Temple, the high seat of his enemy.

As his flock passed through the city gate, dwarfed by the ancient walls towering a hundred and fifty feet into the April afternoon, one of his disciples drew his attention to the colossal size of the edifice.

The Master's answer was brief and ominous:

"When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near!"

Later, as they were making their way up the slopes of Mount Olive, Peter turned to gaze once more at the glory of Zion. The beautiful Greek pillars of the colonnades stood brightly red in the setting April sun. Peter thought of the tumultuous events of the last three days since they marched through the gate singing and waving their palm branches. He could still hear the enthusiastic welcome which the Passover multitudes had given the Master. Yet, there was this irreparable break which the Lord himself had willed to come between himself and the Pharisees, now supported by the Sadducees and all the priestly rulers of the Temple.

It had been a long day. As the apostles ascended the hill above the valley of Kedron, they felt dejected and exhausted. They somehow felt as though they were being tossed on a

stormy ocean which was about to swallow them all.

As their group reached the summit, one of the disciples, his voice quivering with fear and fatigue, asked the Master, "Lord, tell us when will this happen and what shall be the sign?"

The Lord seated himself on a large stone, in full view of Jerusalem. With a voice strong and stern, he began to explain the dire predictions which he had made, beginning with the inevitable destruction of the Holy City and the Temple.

Before long they were all listening to his majestic words, prophesying the end of the world itself, when the powers of the heavens would be shaken. It would happen at the coming of the Son of man in power and great glory.

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

When he concluded his long session of instruction, night had already fallen over the Holy City. The Temple stood silhouetted against a starry April sky as he arose and said in a warm, hopeful voice:

"But he who endures unto the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end shall come."

The Master led their nocturnal march home to Bethany. They walked in silence, but the apostles felt that his visionary words had put courage and cheerfulness back in their hearts. They knew once again that the Kingdom of God was going to be victorious, whatever happened. As long as they had him in their midst, they had nothing to fear.

In a little while they saw the friendly lights of Bethany.

17. The Fearless One

DURING THE forenoon of the next day, the high priest Caiphas conferred secretly with the few trusted men who made up his inner council of advisers. He had not forgotten that several members of the Sanhedrin had recoiled in weak sentimentalism the other day when he had silenced their whimpering talk and directed their attention to the only possible way out of their nauseating dilemna. This misguided enthusiast from Nazareth had to be eliminated, whatever the stupid masses thought of him.

This Wednesday forenoon it was more obvious than ever before that the time had arrived for some decisive action against the Nazarene. Caiphas eyed the men whom he had called to his palace and was satisfied that all were men of clear vision and strong action. To Caiphas' mind this secret session was a necessary preliminary meeting at which suggestions might be worked out to put before the whole Sanhedrin later.

The hard-faced conferees listened to the cold logic of the high priest as he proceeded to outline the case of the Gali-

lean rebel. After a brief summary of the accumulated spy reports on the Nazarene's treacherous actions in Galilee, Judea and Perea, the high priest recounted the climactic events of the last three days, when the Galilean had actually conquered the Temple itself, by stirring up the Passover pilgrims against the authorities.

The mad prophet had repeatedly refused to name any actual authority for his performance. He had proceeded to humiliate the teachers of the Law cursing them with his vile woes. He had screamed that the Holy City would go to its doom in warfare and famine. Yet with twisted duplicity he had announced that it was perfectly in order to pay taxes to Caesar.

To all these accusations voiced by Caiphas, other conferees added that the Galilean had boasted that he would tear down the Temple and rebuild it in three days. At that statement the conferees roared with raucous laughter.

"The man is insane!"

"He apparently thinks he is a god."

"He calls himself the Son of man, and I suppose he sees himself coming on the skies."

The examination of the Galilean's words and acts was brief. His case was too obvious to need much elaboration. Someone pointed out that Pontius Pilate, the governor, had arrived in the Holy City and if a revolt should arise during the Passover feast, this evil-minded Roman would not hesitate to mow the people down and fill the Temple with blood.

Caught between the Romans and the people, the chief priests realized that their task of arresting their enemy was as urgent as it was difficult. The Galilean would have to be apprehended by stealth and, when arrested, swiftly brought

to justice. The conferees, however, rejected a proposal that the arrest be made after the Passover when the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims had left the city to return to their homes. Caiphas stressed that previous experience with the Galilean rebel had taught them that after each feast he had a cunning way of escaping. The time to get him off to his doom was now, and only two days remained till the Feast began.

As the secret session broke up, the conferees followed the high priest to the emergency meeting for which he had arranged with some members of the Sanhedrin. His statesmanship had warned Caiphas against calling a full, formal meeting of the high body, lest some sentimental soul among them might stand up again to defend the rebel and then, perhaps, contrive to warn him somehow of his impending doom. Caiphas had, therefore, ordered that only those members of the Sanhedrin be called to the emergency session on whom one could rely as being strong in support of the extreme action about to be proposed. He had explicitly excluded Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and other council members who might prove hesitant to agree to the arrest and elimination of the Nazarene.

The emergency session immediately ratified the motion to have the Galilean arrested and put away before the Passover. The chief priests were given full authority to find a secret way of snatching this enemy of their nation away from the Passover crowds. As the meeting ended, the members felt that victory and peace could not be far away.

Later that day, the chief priests were surprised when they were informed that a friend of the Galilean was at the door, eager to talk with them.

Had their secret already been betrayed?

As the unexpected caller was ushered into their presence, he identified himself as Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus of Nazareth.

The priests eyed him with deep suspicion mingled with haughty contempt.

"And what brings you here?"

"What will you give me if I deliver him to you?"

"You mean money?"

Judas nodded, as his hand, hidden under his mantle, tightened around the bag in which he carried the depleted treasury of his own group.

There was a long break in the strange conversation as the chief priests hurriedly went into a whispered conference.

The fantastic visitor might be laying a trap to dishonor them all before the people, who held the rebel in love and high esteem as a prophet.

On the other hand, if this wretched man, Judas, meant what he said, he was really a simpleton from Kerioth, who could be bought off for a pittance. One of the priests suggested that they offer him the price which the Law of Moses stipulates for a slave. At that clever suggestion, their whispers rippled with subdued, ironical laughter. Presently the high priest, putting on a sacrimonious expression, said, "Judas, we will pay you thirty pieces of silver."

With that agreement the conference ended.

The apostle turned traitor was hurried out of the room.

That evening, in the quiet of Martha's home, the Lord in his private teaching returned to a theme about which he had often spoken to the Twelve: the prophecy of the suffering Servant of the Lord.

Ever since the days at Caesarea Philippi, the Master's soul had lived in that strange prophecy whenever he attempted to guide his apostles into the divine mystery of God's Messiah.

This evening his voice was deep with sacred emotion as he quoted the words of the prophet Isaiah:

> "Behold, my servant shall be exalted
> and lifted up, and shall be very high."

As these opening words his rapt listeners were so completely transported to the coming glory of Messiah, the King, that their hearts did not hear or grasp the words, which the Lord immediately went on to recite from the same prophetic passage:

> "For he grew up before him as a tender plant,
> and as a root out of a dry ground . . .
> He is despised and rejected by men;
> a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
> And we hid as it were our faces from him;
> he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Peter sat listening, but his mind in reminiscence was wandering along the shores of the Lake of Galilee. Thus he did not pay attention to the Master's concluding words:

> "But he was wounded for our transgressions,
> he was bruised for our iniquities:
> the chastisement of our peace was upon him;
> and with his stripes we are healed."

As the Lord ended the quotation, Thomas kept staring at John, the quiet apostle, who sat next to the Lord. Thomas wondered whether John perchance could understand what these mysterious words meant.

The next day, Peter and John appeared in the Temple, leading a Paschal lamb to the Passover slaughter. Every household and every pilgrim family had their sacrificial lamb slaughtered for the evening meal, which signalled the opening of the Passover feast.

Wading in the blood of the slaughtered lambs reddening the stones of the Temple court, Peter and John moved along with the crowd, their young faces reflecting deep thought and solemn emotions.

Unnoticed they came, unrecognized they left.

The remainder of the day, the two apostles busied themselves with the preparation of the Paschal lamb, the unleavened bread, the wine, the cups, the wild herbs, all in accordance with the Law of the Passover.

The Lord and the Twelve were about to share the Passover meal together, and Peter with John had been directed to go into Jerusalem to prepare the meal in a large upper room.

Toward sundown the two apostles had all in readiness.

In the gathering dusk the Lord and the ten apostles arrived.

The sacrificial meal was about to begin around the U-shaped table. The men present sensed that this was a sacred evening of strange significance to all of Israel. Once again, they were to participate in the joyous feast commemorating God's deliverance of his people from the bondage of Egypt.

In the flickering light of the oil lamps, the apostles sought their places on the divans. It was a little too obvious that each man tried to seat himself as close to the Lord as possible.

As the meal began the Master lifted the first ceremonial cup of wine and gave thanks for the Passover. A grateful smile rested on his calm face as he added:

"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."

The Twelve gazed at him in deep reverence as he folded his hands on the table, the warm living light of the lamps falling on his white robe.

To Peter, John and James came deep, intimate memories of his transfiguration.

Before they had time to begin the meal, however, the Lord suddenly rose, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. The apostles realized that their Master was performing the menial services of a lowly servant. He continued, however, from one to the other, around the whole circle despite their shame-faced protestations. There was a regal perfection over his work, a deed which they were never to forget.

When he had washed their feet, donned his garments and resumed his place he asked them:

"Do you know what I have done to you?"

The apostles kept their silence.

"You call me Master and Lord; and you say well, for so I am. I have given you an example, that you also should

do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say to you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

After this, they drank the second ceremonial cup and chanted the Paschal Hallel,

> When Israel went forth from Egypt,
> the house of Jacob from a people
> of strange language,
> Judah became his sanctuary,
> Israel his dominion.

When they had finished the psalm, their Paschal meal continued in a friendly fellowship charmingly dominated by the double mystery of the ancient story and the presence of him whom they loved.

None of the apostles had noticed that Judas Iscariot this evening was strangely restless and out of spirit. He was sitting next to Peter, who was reclining next to the Master. Before the third ceremonial cup was lifted, the Lord uttered words which shocked the eleven:

"Verily, I say to you, one of you shall betray me."

A burst of exclamations of honest fear greeted his mysterious words as each apostle asked him, "Is it I?"

Heavy sorrow in his voice, the Lord answered, "He who is dipping his hand with me in the same dish, the same shall betray me."

The eleven stared at the two hands over the dish, the Lord's and Judas'. Gazing at Judas with the immeasurable sadness of his boundless love, the Lord continued:

"The Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born."

White with intense fear, Judas Iscariot rose from the table. The eleven stared at him dumbfounded. They did not understand.

As Judas made for the door, the Lord stopped him with a brief farewell:

"What you are going to do, do quickly."

Then Judas disappeared into the night.

The eleven surmised that the treasurer had been sent on an errand and soon dismissed the incident from their minds.

In a moment the third ceremonial cup was raised, followed by the chanting of the latter part of the Hallel.

Suddenly the Lord took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said:

"Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me."

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying:

> "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

As they had all eaten of the bread, they all partook of the cup, returning it at length to the hands of the Lord.

The stillness of a perfect peace filled the room as the eleven kept their eyes fixed on the Lord still holding the sacred cup. He let his grateful eyes travel from one to the other in wordless communion. He knew that they would always remember.

At long last, he began to speak words of farewell and of

reunion, quiet, rich and cheering words, ending with the promise:

"In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

When he had finished his talk, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and for the first time in their entire fellowship with him, they heard him pray a long, full prayer.

They listened, as Eternity itself filled their souls.

Later that evening, they could never tell how much later, the Lord led them out into the Passover night, as the full moon of the month of Nisan made the houses in the deadly still street shine with a whiteness the like of which the Eleven had never seen before.

He led them down into the Kedron valley and across the brook.

The Holy City seemed to be asleep, as he stopped and warned them that this very night they would all run away and forsake him. To a man they protested their undying loyalty. Peter was especially loud and self-assured, but he heard the Master predict:

"This very night, before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times."

Growing vehement with self-defense, Peter exclaimed, "If I should die with you, I will not deny you!"

Presently, the Lord led them on through the moonlit night, turning off into a garden called Gethsemane, where he had often fellowshipped with them, on the previous journeys to Jerusalem.

Having entered the garden, he told the apostles:

"Sit here, while I pray."

Taking Peter, John and James with him, he moved a little farther into the garden, seeking privacy among the ancient trees.

As he turned to the three trusted friends, his whole person shaking with anguished grief, he entreated them:

"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death; remain here and watch."

The three apostles stood looking after him as he walked a stone's throw deeper into the moonlit garden. They saw him fall on his knees, as if in deep despair. In a moment, the nocturnal breeze carried his prayer to their attentive ears:

"Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt."

They looked at one another in silent awe, shaking their heads in incomprehension. Seating themselves on the grass, they waited for the Master's prayers to end. Because of their fatigue, they soon fell asleep.

They did not hear the Lord approaching till he awakened them with dejected sadness in his voice.

"Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Peter thought of something to say, but the Master had already turned, walking back to his place of solitary vigil. Shaken by a struggle which tore at the very roots of his being, his prayer became a loud cry of agony in the Passover night, and his sweat fell like great drops of blood upon the ground:

"O my Father, if this cup cannot pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done."

Again he rose from his prayer and again he found the

three apostles asleep for their eyes were heavy. As he spoke to them, they aroused themselves, but again they did not know what to answer him.

They had not noticed that, as the Master had been praying, a dark figure had stealthily moved toward them, furtively passing in the shadows from tree to tree.

As the Master returned to pray for the third time, Judas kept a watchful eye on the three apostles, lest they discover him and defeat his mission. As Peter, John and James again fell asleep, a malicious smile of derision crossed Judas' face. These were the Master's three key men, and he had even called Peter "the Rock." Judas' smile broadened into an expression of fierce contempt. This miserable group of men he had called a kingdom and he had called himself the Messiah!

Judas stole silently out of the garden, delighted that he had happened to remember Gethsemane as one of the places where the Master might be hiding himself.

Once back in safety outside the garden, Judas hastened his steps. Tomorrow he would be famous.

A little while later, the three apostles heard the Lord calling them anew:

"Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the Hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; behold, my betrayer is at hand."

At that very moment, the marching feet of soldiers echoed through the garden. A great crowd of armed men with lanterns and torches were being led in the direction of the Galilean by a man at the head of the military detachment.

The Lord walked toward them, his steps strong and determined. He was followed closely by Peter, John and James,

their faces frightened, their eyes full of shock. They discerned now a Roman captain accompanied by soldiers with drawn swords, attended by temple guards, chief priests and scribes, the latter carrying clubs.

As the two groups were but a few feet part, the man in front ran to the Lord, kissed him hurriedly and cried with a strained voice, "Master."

The three apostles froze to a standstill; the clear moonlight revealed that it was Judas, one of the Twelve.

"Friend, why are you here? Judas, do you betray the Son of man with a kiss?"

The loving warmth of the Master's voice made the traitor turn aside, wincing in wordless shame.

The Lord took a step forward, addressing the soldiers:

"Whom do you seek?"

"Jesus of Nazareth."

"I am he."

His answer came with such divine strength that the soldiers involuntarily drew back and some of them fell to the ground. Peter, seeing the impact of the Lord's words upon the soldiers, thought of the Transfiguration and was convinced that the very next moment the Lord would smite his enemies and overpower them.

Instead the Master repeated his question:

"Whom do you seek?"

"Jesus of Nazareth."

"I have told you that I am he; if therefore you seek me, let these go their way."

As the soldiers seized him, the Lord continued:

"Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to take me? I sat daily with you in the Temple teaching,

and you did not lay hold on me. But the scriptures must be fulfilled."

As they marched him off, the other eight apostles had come to join Peter, John and James.

Suddenly Peter rushed forward, a drawn sword in his hand. Before he could be stopped, he had severed the ear of one of the temple servants. The scream of the wounded stopped the nocturnal procession just as it was leaving the garden of Gethsemane. A fight was just about to break when the clear and commanding voice of the prisoner rang out over the Romans, the Jews and the Apostles:

"Put up again your sword into its place. For all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword. Do you not think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"

After this strange saying he called the wounded man to him, touched his ear and healed him. The servant's name was Malchus.

As the procession moved on into the sleeping city, the apostles remained standing, their hearts bewildered, their thoughts frozen. Their Master willed his own capture, he let his enemies march him away. And this was happening to him who had raised the dead and had commanded the sea to be still? Lost in defenseless frustation the Eleven watched the raiders march off.

Jesus was walking in front, flanked by six Roman soldiers.

The next moment, nine of the apostles fled, leaving only Peter and John to follow the prisoner.

The two apostles moved along the moonlit road toward

the city, their steps slow and uncertain, shocked as they were by sorrow, confused and defeated.

Ascending the western slope of the city hill, the military detachment presently brought their prisoner to the house of the high priest. Since the Roman soldiers had been assigned to the mission only out of courtesy to the Temple leaders, the Roman captain then marched his soldiers back to the fortress Antonia, leaving the peaceful prisoner in the hands of the Temple authorities and their guards.

By previous agreement among the chief priests, it was decided that the Nazarene be first taken to the superannuated high priest, the cunning Annas, who still retained his dominating influence over the Jerusalem aristocracy. It was felt that the old leader with a life's experience of many a crisis, might be able to devise something which would help to destroy the rebel, when he would be brought before the Sanhedrin.

As the Temple guards led the Lord before Annas, the old man was waiting.

"Who are your disciples? And what do you teach?"

The prisoner answered in a matter-of-fact tone, tinged with moral accusation:

"I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the Temple, where the Jews always come together; and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I have said to them; they know what I said."

The fearless courage of the prisoner flamed through his frank words. One of the guards, who saw the old high priest blanching under the humiliation of the moment, slapped the

prisoner across the face: "Is that how you answer the high priest?"

Turning to the abusive man, the Lord challenged him:

"If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if I have spoken well, why do you strike me?"

Annas stiffened with indignant rage and ordered the prisoner bound and taken across the courtyard to his son-in-law, Caiphas, who was the high priest that year.

It was now about two o'clock in the morning.

The arresting guards had already brought Caiphas the good news that their dangerous night-mission had been successful and that the famous prisoner would be brought over the moment Annas had finished with him. Thus, when the Galilean was announced, Caiphas, surrounded by his trusted men, was prepared. He met the bound prisoner with cool, narrow eyes, unable to hide his intense satisfaction.

The high priest immediately ordered his servants to call the Sanhedrin for a meeting at dawn. In the meantime, he and his adjutants would try to pry enough out of the prisoner to present a strong case in the Sanhedrin against this disturber of God's Israel.

However, the preliminary hearing never got under way, since the prisoner refused to answer a single word. At length, the high priest ordered him removed, to be kept under strict guard till the Sanhedrin could dispose of his case.

Most of the members were present, when the Sanhedrin assembled for the emergency session at the break of day. The council met in the Chamber of Hewn Stones, located near the southwest corner of the inner court of the Temple. The posted

guards stood erect with profound respect, as the leaders of God's Israel passed by into the chamber.

Inside, the council members found their seats: the chief priests, all of them worldly-wise Sadducees; the lay artistocracy, polished politicians of an agnostic bent, and the scribes, doctors of law but not ordained as priests.

Caiphas called the meeting to order and asked that the prisoner be brought in.

All eyes in the chamber were fixed on the door, when the Lord entered, led by two guards.

He walked with regal calm, his hands tied on his back. His head erect, his eyes shining with innocence, he faced the high priest.

The trial began in an orderly manner with the hearing of testimony from a series of accusing witnesses. Before long, however, it became painfully clear to the high tribunal that the testimony offered was too hopelessly confused, self-contradictory, and scanty to have much weight as legal evidence. The members listened in mute silence to the pitiful performance, their faces registering doubt and annoyance.

At length two witnesses were called, who seemed to agree, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.' " On cross-examination, however, they changed their story to, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.' "

Caiphas ordered the confused witnesses removed. Then, rising and turning to the prisoner, he asked, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men witness against you?"

An awkward silence quivered in the room. Depressing

anxiety gripped the legal minds as they realized that the trial had broken down completely.

The prisoner was innocent.

The next moment, the high priest departed from all established legal procedure. Turning upon his prisoner with a defeated tyrant's fanaticism he screamed in panic, "I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God?"

The Sanhedrin chamber was instantly thrown into an uproar, the members all rising, a gasping awe in their ashen faces. At length the answer came, clearly and firmly:

"I am; and I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

Suddenly a ripping sound swished across the room. The high priest violently tore his mantle in symbolic token of extreme horror. Turning to the members of the tribunal, he cried, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard his blasphemy! What is your verdict?"

A unison burst of thunderous voices shrieked in answer, "He deserves death! He deserves death!"

Suddenly the hall was a bedlam of appalling screams and disorder as the leaders of the nation rushed forward to spit in the face of the prisoner, to mock him and to slap him in the face. The fury of their hatred raged down upon the blasphemer who had calmly announced himself to be the Son of God. Their senseless attacks showed clearly that if they had been within reach of stones the members of the Sanhedrin, now turned into a mad mob, would have fulfilled the Mosaic

commandment, that a blasphemer in Israel must be put to death by stoning.

When order returned, the members found their seats, as the high priest ordered the prisoner kept under heavy guard.

When John and Peter had arrived at the palace of the chief priest, John had gained entrance to the courtyard through the word of one of the servants known to him. A moment later he had also managed to get permission for Peter to be admitted. Peter had joined some soldiers warming themselves at a fire in the courtyard.

One of the maids of the high priest had suddenly appeared walking directly up to the apostle and challenged him before all present, "You were also with Jesus of Galilee."

Peter felt all eyes upon him and raised his voice in a frightened denial, "I do not know what you are talking about. Woman, I do not know him."

The talk around the fire turned back to the prisoner and what might happen to him. Peter did not seem to hear, as he had made up his mind to sneak away from this dangerous company. Moments later he rose carefully and sauntered over to one of the porches. He felt like leaving the scene altogether but some invisible force kept him in this yard of his Master's arch enemy, the ruling high priest. The frightened apostle kept in the shadow of the porch, determined to stay to see what would happen. The night had been an abyss of inscrutable events.

Once again he was awakened. Another maid stopped before him and cried with a loud voice, "This is one of them! This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth."

As the soldiers and the servants moved closer, Peter

looked angrily at the maid and cried his second denial, "Woman, I am not! I do not know the man." As if to show his innocence Peter made his feet carry him back again to the group sitting around the fire. He felt relieved that they all seemed to have accepted his word against the accusations of the two maids.

After a while, however, some of the men turned to him and voiced their awakened suspicion, "Surely you are also one of them, for your dialect betrays you—you are a Galilean!"

At the threatening words the frightened apostle sprang to his feet, cursing and swearing with the intense abandon of a man fighting for his very life, "I do not know the man."

At that very moment, guards appeared, marching Jesus to the prisoners' lock-up. In the chill, nocturnal air a cock crowed against the breaking dawn. For a brief moment the Lord turned and looked with warming love at his cursing apostle. And Peter remembered how the Lord had warned him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." Peter's sad eyes kept following the Lord, as soldiers marched him away: "You did, you did, you did!"—something was shouting through the apostle's bruised conscience. The next moment, weeping bitterly, Peter was running through the gate.

Under the chairmanship of Caiphas, the Sanhedrin members continued their consultations. Inasmuch as the Roman occupation had deprived them of the right to mete out capital punishment, they were compelled to refer the case of Jesus of Nazareth to the Roman governor. By his own lips, the prisoner had publicly confessed to the crime of high treason against

Rome. He had admitted that he was the Messiah, the King. He had also committed the infinitely more horrendous crime of blasphemy, claiming to be the Son of the Blessed.

Both crimes were punishable by death.

After a lengthy discussion, the Sanhedrin decided that the Roman governor would probably act more swiftly on the political crime. Therefore, this accusation should be particularly stressed in the indictment presented before the Romans.

Being doctors of the Law, some of the scribes secretly harbored scruples about the legality of their procedure. It was unlawful to permit a defendant to testify in his own behalf if two witnesses who agreed in their testimony could not be produced. But, then, this defendant was unique, the legal minds reassured themselves without changing their guilty frowns.

In the early morning hours the whole company of the Sanhedrin arose to conduct the prisoner to the prætorium of the Roman governor.

As the priests and the scribes were waiting in the Temple yard for the guards to bring out the prisoner, Judas, the betrayer, came storming at them. With a despairing cry of remorse he threw the thirty pieces of silver at them, screaming, "I have sinned! I have sinned in betraying innocent blood! Innocent blood!"

The chief priests answered him, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."

Rushing away with the desperate speed of a man in extreme panic, Judas disappeared, just as the Temple guards led the Lord out to be taken to the Roman judge.

The priestly procession with the bound prophet-prisoner came to a halt before the huge copper doors of the Antonia

fortress, which adjoined the Temple to the northwest. As a trumpet announced their arrival, Caiphas and Annas strode with obvious self-admiration between rows of their armed guards in order to present themselves before the Roman governor the moment the doors opened.

The crowd which followed the prisoner and the chief priests rapidly filled the huge courtyard, which the Jews called Gabbatha but the Greeks Lithostrotos after the big slabs of stones, which paved the yard.

Presently the copper doors creaked on their hinges and the inner court became visible. Hushed silence fell upon the crowd, as a centurion appeared to inquire what errand brought the chief priests hither. He was informed that they were bringing to the governor the Galilean rebel of whom they had informed Pontius Pilate the night before. He was now their prisoner and they were ready to hand him over to the Roman authority. However, since the Jewish Passover demands that the devout do not defile themselves by entering the house of a non-Jew, the prisoner would have to fetched at the gates.

The Roman official who received Caiphas' message immediately turned to bring the news to the Governor.

Pontius Pilate ordered the *praetorium* and the *curule* brought out and set up just outside the copper doors. Roman soldiers carried the *praetorium*, a semicircular wooden platform, through the inner yard and placed it in the Gabbatha, where the chief priests and their prisoner were standing. In a moment two officials appeared carrying the Governor's *curule*, a plain, heavy chair which the Roman judges used throughout the whole empire, whenever they heard cases and sat in judgment.

When these arrangements had been made, Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Emperor Tiberius, made his appearance.

He was a middle-aged man and walked toward the *praetorium* accompanied by soldiers of his personal guard. The soldier-judge proceeded with studied slowness toward the outer yard, which was now quickly filling with a mob of curious spectators surrounding the Sanhedrists and its Temple guards. His fellow Romans sensed that the Governor wanted to impress the priests and the crowd with the majestic power of the Roman Law.

Without greeting Caiphas and his priestly group, Pontius Pilate ascended the *praetorium* and seated himself in the chair.

An awesome silence greeted the august Roman in the white toga as he confronted the crowd, the priestly accusers and their prisoner.

The Governor prolonged the silent moment. Experience had taught him that *jus Romanum* spoke even when it was silent.

Presently he directed his first question to Caiphas, the chief priest, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

The two leaders eyed each other in a moment full of mutual, frigid contempt. Then, raising his priestly voice in irritated irony Caiphas retorted, "If this man were not an evil doer, we would not have handed him over."

The Roman governor noticed the impertinence of the remark and shot back, "Take him yourself and judge him by your own law."

It was obvious to both Romans and Jews that the governor's arrogant reply was meant as an insult to an inferior

people with laws inferior to those of the Roman Empire.

Caiphas stiffened for a moment but answered with sly slowness, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death!"

A sudden murmur filled the yard. Pontius Pilate found himself charged with an inescapable duty. They demanded that he hear a case which might lead to capital punishment. The soldier in him took a closer look at the quiet prisoner, as he suddenly realized that he alone among all these humans had authority over a man's life and death. Straightening in his chair, he soberly asked for the indictment.

The chief priest raised his voice so that the quiet multitude could hear his every word: "We found this fellow perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a King."

Many heads in the crowded yard nodded in violent agreement with the indictment, but it did not escape Pontius Pilate's attention that some of the priests and scribes turned to one another in shocked consternation. The Roman could not know that the Jewish chief priest had told a direct lie, but his inner sense of fair play immediately warned him that something was radically wrong with the accusation. Again he gazed at the man whom they accused of sedition. Also, he thought, it was suspicious that Jews were bringing a Jew before a Roman to have him put to death. Only too well did he know how this miserable people made a point of shielding and protecting one another. He let his eye scan the mob behind the priests and felt that he could not discover a single decent Passover pilgrim in the whole crowd.

Keeping a somber, stern face to hide his feelings, he ordered his Roman soldiers to take the strange prisoner into the inner yard for a private hearing. He was not going to be

pushed around by some envious priests. *Jus Romanum* was a sacred obligation.

The restless but silent crowd saw him rise from the *curule,* stand for a moment and then descend to follow the soldiers leading the quiet prisoner into the Governor's private quarters.

A moment later he was face to face with the Galilean. He looked at the knotted wrists and then at the prisoner's face, serene with guiltless calm.

"Are you the King of the Jews?"

"Do you say this of yourself, or did others tell it to you about me?"

The prisoner's counterquestion came as a surprise and it carried with it the strange undertone of a challenge. The Roman answered with a show of irritation, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me; what have you done?"

"My kingship is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not of the world."

The Galilean spoke with a solemn manliness which startled the governor. His confession admitted a kingship, but it had nothing to do with this world. Whoever this man's servants were, they had not been able to protect him even from his own nation. Yet, it was obvious that he possessed a strange personal power of dignified conviction. The next moment their eyes met, as Pontius Pilate inquired, "Then you are a king?"

"You say that I am king. For this I was born, and for this cause did I come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

The governor was at the point of asking a further ques-

tion about the prisoner's kingship, when he abruptly ended the hearing with an empty, "What is truth?" The Roman had heard enough to convince him that the Galilean was an innocent man, a dreamer, perhaps, but certainly not a seditionist rebel leader dangerous to Rome's power.

Leaving his prisoner, the governor walked out to the inner court. Crossing it at a brisk pace he steered his firm steps to the judgment seat. The priests and the people sensed that the Roman had reached a decision. Those far back in the yard stood tip-toe to see the man in the white toga as he seated himself.

Coming ruthlessly to the point, Pontius Pilate directed the terse statement of his findings to Caiphas, "I find no crime in him!" The solemn public announcement of the Galilean's innocence made the chief priests reel with a shock of incredulity. The next moment loud mutterings of disapproval began to rise from the multitude. Before long, abusive protestations spread from the priests and the scribes to the people until the screaming accusations thundered against the walls of the fortress.

Pontius Pilate sat staring at the mob scene, his eyes cold with bruised pride. How he hated these people!

At length, he arose and without a word walked up to the prisoner. Half in anger, he pleaded with the Galilean, "Do you not hear how many charges they bring against you?"

The two men listened to the strident, shrieking cries of the mob; but the prisoner kept silent.

The governor wondered greatly. At length he realized his mistake. Suddenly he turned and again marched back to the *praetorium* to repeat his verdict of not guilty.

His statement was met with a hissing answer from Cai-

phas, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."

The next moment, Pontius Pilate, recalling the prisoner's dialect, verified the fact that the defendant was a Galilean. As such, he belonged to the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, the governor's personal enemy. Having already thrown the awkward case out of his own court and filled with a sense of relief, tinged with political malice, Pontius Pilate therefore ordered Caiphas to take his prisoner before Herod Antipas, since even that double-crossing character had come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

A little while later, as the priestly guards were bringing the Galilean away to Herod, the Roman governor congratulated himself for having rid himself of an obviously fabricated case. Also, Herod, the intriguing spy and slanderer, deserved to be repaid, he thought, for the insidious reports which he constantly was sending to the court in Rome, defaming all ruling officials in this part of the empire.

Herod, Herodias and Salome, with their retinue, had taken up residence during the Passover season at the palace of the Asmoneans. A totally secularized Jew, holy feasts had long since ceased to be of any personal or religious significance to the sensuous, weak tetrarch of Galilee. He came to festive Jerusalem to meet like-mined paganized libertines whose guiding star was of the flesh and not of the spirit.

This early morning, Herod and his noisy crowd were just finishing a nocturnal bacchanal patterned upon what he and

Herodias had learned about such orgies in aristocratic Roman circles, when one of the tetrarch's guards brought the startling news that the chief priests were at the palace gate. They were bringing with them a certain Jesus of Nazareth, a prisoner whom Pontius Pilate, the procurator, had ordered brought before Herod, since the culprit was a Galilean.

Rousing himself awake, the surprised ruler announced that he was delighted, at long last, to have a chance to meet this prophet, whom he had wished to see for better than a year. This religious fanatic had once dared to call him, the tetrarch, a fox; but Herod roared with drunk laughter that this was all forgotten and forgiven. Not without a touch of pride in his own excellence, the boisterous, alcoholic ruler suggested that the prophet had perhaps come pretty close to the truth. In fact, the tetrarch did not at all object to being called a fox. Foxes were excellent and cunning creatures! At this remark the whole company of aristocratic drunks roared with laughter and followed their host out into the chilly April dawn.

Down by the palace gate the tetrarch found a huge, angry mob led by Caiphas and the other chief priests. Herod stared at the quiet prisoner. He did not, at all, resemble John the Baptist. Yet, this man was rumored to be the greatest prophet in Israel since Moses. So he must certainly be able now to perform some of his great signs. The babbling ruler explained all this to his listeners, those who had followed him out of the royal banquet hall and those who stood in sullen anger around the chief priests.

The next moment Herod therefore began to question the prisoner about his wonder-working power and his miracles, entreating him to perform. There was no answer from the

prisoner, and the ruler grew more insistent, demanding to be shown some miracles.

The prophet kept looking directly at the murderer of his cousin, John the Baptist. A regal expression of moral condemnation stood in the Nazarene's anguished face as Herod kept up his drunk babbling, egged on by his nocturnal drinking partners.

As a sudden lull ensued, the chief priests incited the indignant mob to scream their accusations, now much more loudly than in the court of Pontius Pilate. Before long the crowds on both sides of the palace gate converged into a wild bedlam of mocking contempt.

Tiring of the frustrating hilarity of insulting the silent prisoner, Herod whispered an order to one of his chamberlains, who swiftly disappeared in the direction of the palace.

Presently, the chamberlain reappeared carrying a gaudy royal robe. Reaching for the apparel Herod staggered over and threw the robe over the shoulders of the man whom the mob had called a king.

At this gesture, the tetrarch's friends roared with howling laughter and mocked the prisoner with the vilest words their malice could find.

Suddenly Herod Antipas raised an unsteady arm into the air and ordered the bedecked Galilean taken back to the Romans.

In the Antonia, Pontius Pilate was about to return to his official Jerusalem residence, the huge palace of Herod the

Great, when a court official brought him the dismaying news that the chief priests were bringing the Galilean back from Herod. It was about nine o'clock in the morning.

Angered at the obstinate impertinence of the chief priests, the Roman governor decided to dumbfound the mob with a suddenness of action as swift as a blitz-like military move. Hastening to the *praetorium* Pontius Pilate called for silence as he cried to the priests and the crowd, his voice vibrant with irony and indignation, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; neither did Herod, when I sent you to him. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; I will therefore chastise him and release him."

As he was finishing, a new group of Jews came marching into the outer yard, elbowing through the milling crowd already assembled before the *praetorium.* The next moment the Roman governor heard the leaders of the new group request that he release with amnesty a Jewish prisoner as was the custom each Passover.

While the crowd quieted down, Pontius Pilate again stared at the bound Galilean now clothed with the gaudy, old robe. Suddenly the Governor realized that fate was handing him a most welcome chance to get out of his painful dilemna. He would free the Galilean by making use of the request for a prisoner's release!

With a faint smile of relief, he hurriedly asked the chief priests and the crowd, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you, Barrabas or Jesus who is called Christ?" He felt a gleeful satisfaction at his own clever suggestion, for Barrabas was an infamous murderous rebel.

The next instant, however, the priests began to chant in unison, "We want Barrabas! We want Barrabas!" Looking around for help, they encouraged the mob to join in their savage cry.

In a moment two thousand wild voices shrieked, "Barrabas, Barrabas, Barrabas!"

"Give us Barrabas!"

A second time the irresolute Pontius Pilate asked, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?"

A storm of voices answered, "Barrabas!"

As the insanity of the crowd grew, the Roman felt a terrifying chill spreading through his whole being. Only an hour before he had received an urgent message from his wife Claudia warning him to have nothing to do with condemning that righteous man, the strange prophet-prisoner. Now he, the Roman procurator, was watching *jus Romanum* being nullified by the seething, hysterical mass before him.

As he raised a tired arm into the air, the bedlam subsided. In an exasperated voice he asked, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

The chief priests immediately cried, "Let him be crucified." Taking this priestly demand as their cue the irrepressible masses repeated the cry, raising it to a piercing mad crescendo:

"Crucify! Crucify!"

"Away with him!"

"Crucify! Crucify!"

"Destroy him! Crucify him!"

Caiphas turned with a satisfied grin to his father-in-law Annas, who during the deliberations of the night had predicted that the Roman governor could be pressed into doing

the will of the priests and the people. Annas smiled in return. They were closing in on the Roman. In fact, it was most fortunate that this new delegation requesting the traditional Passover amnesty had appeared just at a moment when their own case against the hated Galilean blasphemer seemed to be hopelessly blocked.

Pontius Pilate watched the ugly display of mass hatred, the like of which he had never thought possible among human beings. The orgies of Roman crowds, he thought, fanatically enjoying the bloody doom of gladiators, were barbaric enough, but to hear these priests scream for the release of a notorious robber and killer . . . ?

Baffled and beaten, he ordered the release of Barrabas to the delegation which had requested the Passover amnesty.

At his announcement a victory yell from the crowd re-echoed against the fortress walls. With the prospects of a spectacle of ruthless execution filling their animal minds, the crowds resumed their crucifixion cries.

The tumultuous scene was assuming proportions close to a riot.

The soldier in Pontius Pilate acknowledged the crushing defeat which so unexpectedly had nullified his clever maneuver. Led by the priests, the insane mob had actually demanded and received the release of Barrabas. Seeing that henceforth it was impossible to placate this crowd by words alone, the Roman decided that the time to act had come.

Ordering a water basin brought to the judgment seat he began therefore ostentatiously to wash his hands before the mob. At this strange sight the frenzied crowd immediately froze into surprised silence.

With flaming contempt the governor stared at the hard

faces. Then holding his white hands aloft, he cried in a voice vibrating with hatred and disdain, "I am innocent of this just man's blood! See to it yourselves!"

The chief priests sneered at the Roman and gave him a prompt answer, "His blood be on us and our children!"

Pontius Pilate immediately proceeded to the second act he had in mind, and ordered the prisoner taken into the fortress prison-yard to be flogged.

The chief priests and the mob heard this command with a howl of delight, since they remembered that Roman custom often called for the scourging of a prisoner before his being doomed to death. As brutal soldiers were dragging the silent prisoner away to the inner fortress, the murderous mob greeted the hapless Galilean with waves of vile shouts.

Dejected, the Roman governor rose from his judgment seat. His set face, hard with ill-concealed rage, belied his secret intentions. He was actually ordering the flogging of the prisoner for reasons quite different from those the chief priests thought he might have. Pontius Pilate told himself that he was not preparing the accused for the death sentence but, for the release, which inevitably would follow the beastly scourging once the mob saw this innocent man return, dripping with blood.

There must be some pity left in these malicious souls, the Roman assured himself.

In the privacy of an inner court yard, the soldiers assigned to the sadistic task stripped the silent prisoner. They bound him by the wrists to the flogging pole, where he stood helplessly unprotected, bent. The next moment, the *flagellum* was brought out, a heavy whip of raw-hide tails tipped with metal balls.

The stifling hot prison yard echoed with the whirring sound of the whip's tails flying through the air followed by sickening thuds of metal balls sinking into raw human flesh. Blood was streaming profusely from the suffering prisoner, his face in febrile agony. His lips remained silent.

At last, the scourging finished, the soldiers released him. With excruciating pain the prisoner braced himself to let their hard hands cover him again with his own garments, which in a moment were reddened with blood.

Over his garments, the raucous soldiers threw a cheap purple robe to substitute for the gaudy one with which he had been covered when brought from the *praetorium* before the flogging. Yelling at the top of their raw voices they mockingly saluted him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Suddenly another cruel idea caught their brutal minds. Plaiting a crown of thorns they pressed it upon his head. When he still remained serenely silent, they struck him with their hands.

At length, they brought him back to Pontius Pilate's private quarters.

Once again the governor and the prisoner stood face to face. The wounded, feverish Lord looked with pity into the procurator's apprehensive eyes until the Roman turned away.

Calling one of his officials, the governor explained that he would go out himself to prepare the multitude for the horrendous sight in store for them and that the soldiers should then bring the prisoner out.

Pontius Pilate crossed with weary, slow steps to the *praetorium* and said to the people, "Behold, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him."

A moment later, Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.

Bleeding and in grievous agony, his wrists tied, the Master looked at the shocked multitude with passionate love.

Pilate said to them, "*Ecce homo.*"

Sensing that a feeling of sincere pity was growing throughout the awed crowd, the chief priests and their henchmen cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

Rising in anger, Pilate defied them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him!"

Caiphas and the chief priests cried back, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God."

Once again a sickening fright conquered Pilate's mind. An agnostic, he was suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of panic at being in the hands of a dangerous Unknown. Taking his prisoner — by now scarcely able to walk — aside once more, the stunned Roman asked Jesus, "Where are you from?"

There was no answer.

The helpless governor continued, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and power to release you?"

"You would have no power at all over me except it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."

Pontius Pilate thought of Caiphas. Ending the brief interlude, he came forth and announced that the innocent prisoner would be released.

The chief priests, however, had used the interlude well. Now they played their trump card, "If you let this man go,

you are not Caesar's friend; whoever makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar."

Reeling inwardly at the new attack from the maliciously brilliant priests, the Roman summoned what was left of his mental resources. He ordered the prisoner brought before his judgment seat, now sweltering in the noon-day heat.

With stubborn scorn in his weakening voice he cried, "Behold you King!"

A storm of voices broke loose, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your King?"

A brief lull followed the governor's question. Then the voices of the chief priests rang out in unison, "We have no king but Caesar!"

Pontius Pilate looked down at the distorted, ashen faces of the Jewish priests shouting their homage to Caesar. He shook his head.

He handed the prisoner over to them to be crucified.

Walking very slowly back to his quarters in the Antonia, the forlorn procurator remembered the words of a Stoic in Rome who had loved to repeat the ancient adage, "Beware of the wheels of Fate."

Moments later Pontius Pilate was driven back to his palace. He felt defeated and crushed. Something told him that this night of horror would stay with him forever. The face of the silent, condemned Galilean stod imprinted upon his frightened mind, as he tried to fathom what wheels of Fate had been grinding to dust the power and the justice of Rome. He cursed the priests and hoped that the whole incident might soon be forgotten.

18. The Lamb of God

THE ROMAN soldiers took the condemned man into the common hall, which soon filled with brutal and curious Romans assigned to the Temple for the Passover. Since the tradition made condemned men preys of any violence that might come to the minds of the executioners, the morning dragged on as the soldiers proceeded to make the most of the unexpected situation. Evil imagination told them that this Jewish King ought to be given a mock coronation. So they took the crown of thorns, and pressing it down upon his head, they put a reed in his right hand. Then throwing themselves with roaring laughter at his knees they paid mocking homage to him, screaming into his silent, drawn face, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they covered his face with spit, grabbed the reed away from him, let their fists fly against his head and mocked him.

At length the soldiers tired of their own madness, took the robe off the prisoner, howled at his scourged back and put his own raiment on him and led him away to crucify him. A moment later the execution was moving up the street toward the gate in the north wall. In front rode Roman cav-

alry soldiers shunting the over-curious onlookers toward the walls. Behind the horses walked a court official carrying the official warrant dictated by Pontius Pilate. It was written in Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

The doomed prophet, carrying the heavy crossbeam of his cross, came next.

Again and again his broken, bloody body stumbled under the weight of the roughly hewn beam. The Roman centurion, in charge of the execution, frightened by the thought that the doomed man might collapse before reaching the crucifixion area, suddenly halted a passer-by and compelled him to carry the crossbeam. The cross-bearer's name was Simon of Cyrene. He was ordered to march between the condemned man and the rear guard of Roman soldiers with spears.

At the pitiful sight of the Galilean, compassionate women with hearts of mercy, standing by the road, began to beat their breasts, bewailing and lamenting him. Suddenly the Lord turned to them and said:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they shall say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us;' and the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this to a green tree, what shall be done to the dry?"

A little later, the procession reached a low hill outside the city walls. Since it looked somewhat like a skull, the place had long been called Golgatha. There three vertical poles were already raised, the middle one for the Galilean, the others for two doomed men also being brought out for execution.

As Simon of Cyrene laid the cross-beam on the ground, a Roman soldier offered the strange, silent prisoner a drink of wine mixed with myrrh.

The Lord tasted it but would not drink it.

As he was stretched on the ground, two soldiers placed his wounded arms on the crossbeam and drove a coarse nail through each of his hands. A third soldier stood ready with a heavy rope and in a moment the soldiers hoisted his body up on the pole, nailing the crossbeam fast to the vertical *staticulum.*

Thus the Master was lifted up, clearly visible to the crowd assembled beyond the detachment of Roman soldiers serving as the execution squad for the day.

Three crosses stood clear against the sky, a condemned man on each, hanging with hands and feet nailed.

The blistering heat of the noontide sun was beating mercilessly down upon them.

Their ugly task done, the Roman soldiers immediately formed a protective ring around the cross, preventing any friend, foe or relative from approaching. Following their custom, the mercenary soldiers began to divide the doomed men's garments. This was their allotted spoil at executions.

However, when they came to Jesus' tunic they discovered that it was a garment of good quality, woven in one piece. They examined it with eager eyes.

"It is a fine piece."

"It would be a pity to cut it up."

"Right. Why don't we throw for it?"

Thus they agreed to cast lots for the tunic. In a moment the winner was designated by the cast of the dice.

The Roman soldiers were presently alerted by the cen-

turion. Signs rapidly developed indicating that the intense hatred from Gabbatha in the Antonia fortress had followed the masses out to Golgatha. It had not escaped the watchful eyes of the centurion that Caiphas and the chief priests had followed their hated enemy to his execution. The priests now stood together in a group, as close to the crosses as they were permitted to come. Looking at the religious madmen with deep disgust the centurion saw their evil victory smiles.

Pointing to the crucified Lord, the chief priests turned to the people around them and launched into a malicious, scoffing attack, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. If he be the Christ, the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, that we may see and believe."

Sensing that somehow the crowd was not responding to their mockery, the angry rulers continued, "He put his trust in God; let God deliver him now! Did he not say, 'I am the Son of God.' "

The next moment, incensed men and women moved threateningly toward the cross, wagging their heads and raising their clenched fists. A scribe shrieked across the Roman soldiers to the crucified one, "Hey! You who would destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

The chief priests kept eyeing the inscription above the Lord's head. It read, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. When they had first seen it, at the start of the execution procession, they had sent a delegation to the governor, demanding that the superscription be changed to, "He said he is the King of the Jews." With scornful contempt, Pontius Pilate answered, "What I wrote, I wrote."

Now the tantalizing inscription was still hanging there unchanged for all to see.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The man on the cross was praying, his eyes lifted toward heaven.

One of the men crucified with him, repeating the ugly words that reached his ears from the ground, railed at him, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" His derision was answered, however, by the other doomed man, "Do you not fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

As the soldiers, the priests and the crowds fell silent, the doomed robber continued, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

From the middle cross came the clear, warm answer:

"Verily, I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise."

This promise sent, as it were, a breeze from heaven over the ugly scene. Here and there men and women began to feel that the Innocent One was living his Glad Tidings to sinners even upon the cross.

The apostle John, who with the mother of Jesus stood a little off to the side of the crosses, observed that the Lord had turned his deep, feverish eyes upon his mother. As his nailed hands prevented him from making any other sign, the crucified son used his ebbing energy to nod his thorn-crowned head. In a voice of infinite compassion he said:

"Woman, behold your son."

His mother, her noble face shining with the wonder of a thousand mysteries, met the gaze of her crucified son. Tears

in her eyes, she nodded a grateful farewell. The same instant she felt the strong, protective arm of her new son around her frail shoulders. As though he wanted to seal the adoption, the Lord again smiled in the direction of the apostle:

"Behold your Mother."

Then he fell silent, oblivious to the world of men.

Racked with hellish pain, his scourged, crucified body was dying. On his pure face stood the nameless anguish of the inner struggle of his spirit.

Following his Master's agony as it deepened, John's heart recalled the Transfiguration and how, only the night before, his beloved hands had held the blessed cup at the last supper.

John turned to see that the chief priests had by now gone off to their Passover work in the Temple. The multitude was also thinning out, but at a distance the apostle saw friends from Galilee, including some women, who had served the Lord and the Twelve on their journeys. John's eyes sought in vain for any of his ten fellow apostles. But he harbored no critical thoughts, since he himself did not really know how he had come to be there. In truth, ever since Gethsemane, his own steps had been commandeered by a power stronger than his fear.

As the hours passed on, an eery darkness blackened the skies of Judea. A nocturnal stillness filled Calvary, broken only by the occasional laughter of the Roman soldiers keeping watch beneath the three crosses.

At length, the man on the middle cross cried aloud, his voice weary unto death:

"Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani."

The Jewish bystanders, friends and foes, instantly recog-

nized his cry. It was a quotation from the Messianic hymn, saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The sound of the agonized question shook the listeners with the elemental force of a divine impact.

Out of the depths of his lonely death, the Crucified One was crying out the words of God's Messiah.

Some slow-witted underling misunderstood and shouted, "This man is calling Elijah."

Taking pity upon the dying man, one of the soldiers fetched the bowl of water and vinegar, which the soldiers had for their long hours of crucifixion duty. Dipping a sponge into the liquid, the merciful soldier put it on a rod and held it to the Galilean's mouth.

At that moment one of the bystanders derided the soldier with an ironical, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

These were the last words which the Son of Man heard from his fellowmen.

After he had drunk the vinegar an expression of perfect peace filled his exhausted face. Presently he spoke again:

"It is finished."

A moment later his final victorious cry echoed across the crowd, his voice strong with gladness:

"Father, into they hands I commit my spirit."

As he bowed his head and gave up his spirit, the centurion who was the *executor mortis,* came forward to verify the death.

Fixing his eyes upon the lifeless Christ, the centurion said for all to hear, "Truly this man was innocent! Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Soon after this, a strange double movement of people began on Calvary.

The majority of the spectators began to beat their breasts according to the Jewish custom at funerals. Howling and weeping, they soon drifted away from the execution place returning to their homes to prepare themselves for the great Sabbath of the Passover.

Simultaneously, however, a small group of his disciples had assembled behind the soldiers watching the three crosses, where two men still awaited the relief of death.

These disciples, headed by John, the apostle and the Virgin Mother, were joined by Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas, Salome, the mother of John and James, and several other women. They had come up from Galilee for the Passover. Now they stood in silent sorrow before his cross, quiet tears telling the sacred story of their love and their loss.

Presently a ruler of Israel joined their group. It was Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Sanhedrin, a just and devout man. For some time he had been a secret disciple of the Master. In fact, he was known to have defended the Lord in the Sanhedrin chamber itself. Now he came to the hill of Calvary to be publicly counted among the friends of the Crucified One.

After a while Joseph of Arimathea was seen leaving the group at the foot of the cross, hastening in the direction of the city gate.

A few minutes later he was announced to Pontius Pilate, who granted him audience. Eagerly Joseph walked across the marble hall to present himself before the governor. With

firmness of voice he pleaded to have the body of Jesus of Nazareth released to him for burial.

Pontius Pilate received the news that the doomed prophet was already dead with visible incredulity. Asking his visitor to wait, he sent for the *executor mortis*, who came to verify the fact of the death of Jesus.

Gazing at this strange ruler of Israel, who obviously was a friend of the executed, Pontius Pilate granted his request.

With the written permission to remove the body, Joseph of Arimathea hastened back to Golgatha to join the other disciples.

Later, a Roman dispatch rider rode into Calvary, delivering a message to the centurion.

Moments after Joseph of Arimathea had left the governor's palace, the chief priests had come to request that the death of the crucified men be hastened by applying the *crucifragium* upon them, which meant the crushing of their legs. This request of the chief priests was made so that the ritual purity of the Passover city would be assured. No corpse must be permitted to make the city unclean.

Reading the governor's order handed him by the rider, the centurion forthwith asked two soldiers to proceed with the crushing of the legs of the crucified men.

This was done with the two robbers, who were still alive. As they came to Jesus, however, the soldiers saw that he had already expired. Leaving his legs unbroken, one of the soldiers pierced the Lord's side with a spear and there came out blood and water.

After another visit to the city, Joseph of Arimathea returned to Calvary, this time with a clean linen shroud for the burial of the Master. He was accompanied by Nicodemus,

who brought one hundred pounds of mixture of myrrh and aloes.

While the Roman soldiers rushed to take the bodies of the two robbers from the crosses to the common grave of criminals, the disciples of the Nazarene began to lift his body down from the middle cross. With the tenderness of infinite love, the apostle and the two rulers let the sacred body sink slowly into waiting arms, which carried him to a bier.

Presently the solemn funeral procession made its way across Calvary toward a garden close by where Joseph of Arimathea owned a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had as yet been laid.

After preparing the body for burial, they placed it in the tomb, which was then closed by Joseph. Men helped him to roll a great stone to the door of the sepulchre.

While Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joses still tarried at the tomb, the rest of their little group trudged back to the Holy City.

Their sorrow-laden figures were silhouetted against the setting sun.

The Sabbath had come.

The following day the disciples of Jesus rested according to the commandment concerning the Sabbath. Once again, however, the chief priests and the elders found it necessary to present themselves before the gates of the Jerusalem domicile of the Roman governor.

At length, the reluctant procurator appeared before their surprise Sabbath delegation. The group of scared men brought this strange request, "Sir, we remember how this imposter said, while he was yet alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Command therefore that the sepulchre be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He is risen from the dead' so the last fraud shall be worse than the first."

Pontius Pilate examined their frightened faces.

First, they murder an innocent man, he mused, and now they stand here, begging for soldiers to guard the executed man's tomb from corpse-snatchers. He looked at them long and hard. Then, with biting irony in his voice, he answered, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go your way, make it as secure as you can!"

Rushing away, Caiphas and the elders hurried to the tomb and made it secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. Relieved, but still torn with uncertainty, they returned to the Temple, warning all to keep strict silence about the frightening thing which had happened the moment Jesus died: the curtain in the holy place had been torn in two, from top to bottom!

The Third Day

The Third Day

THE THIRD day He rose again.

In the still of the Judean night the Roman soldiers kept their watch outside the tomb of the crucified Galilean.

In the stillness of His sacred resting place within the tomb of Joseph of Arithmathea the Son of God was raised by God, the Father, to the newness of the resurrection life.

Laying aside the burial cloths in orderly fashion—the napkin wrapped up in a place by itself—the Lord returned to the world of men.

No one expected him.

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards did shake and become as dead men.

Passing by them Jesus Christ walked out of the tomb. Easter had come—forever!

He had given His life for the sins of the world, God being in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Victorious over sin and death, the Redeemer of the World returned the third

day to the world that had crucified Him. His resurrection body carried the wounds of His love: the marks of the nails in His hands and the scar of His pierced side. Death could not hold Him, whose holiness had no penalty to pay to Death, the wages of sin.

As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary and Salome came to see the sepulchre. They were walking in the silence of sorrow, constrained by a love that wished to make His body ready for the eternal sleep. Approaching the tomb one of them broke the silence, halted and asked in despairing gloom: "Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" The stone was heavy and sealed.

As the sun was rising in the clear dawn they looked up to see that the stone was already rolled away. The guards were nowhere to be seen. Hastening their steps towards the open tomb, the thoughtful women froze in their tracks, as they arrived at the door. An angel greeted them from the sacred place:

> "Fear not: for I know that you
> seek Jesus, who was crucified.
> He is not here.
> He is risen, as He said.
> Come, see the place where the Lord lay.
> Go quickly, and tell his disciples and Peter
> that He is risen from the dead.
> Behold, He goes before you into Galilee.
> There you shall see Him,
> as He promised you."

In fear and joy the women ran from the grave, rushing the

angelic message to the disciples who had seen no reason for going to the tomb.

Entering the Upper Room with their story the women were face to face with the gloomy and doubting apostles who refused to believe what they were told. No man ever left his grave, so the apostles rebuked the women for bringing such idle tales.

Downhearted, Mary Magdalene stole away from the apostolic company, returning to the grave in the garden. Perhaps someone had removed His body? How could she find Him to anoint Him?

As she approached the open tomb, her heart was numb with lost loneliness. Heavy tears were streaming down her face. Stealing close to the opened door, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre and saw two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

"Woman, why do you weep?"

"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him."

Backing away from the grave, she turned to find herself in the presence of an unknown man.

"Woman, why do you weep?"

Thinking that she was talking with the caretaker-gardener, she answered: "Sir, if you have taken Him away from here, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

Immediately a wave of recognition flooded her mind and her heart. It was His voice!

"Rabboni."

As she rushed forward to touch Him, the Risen One spoke again:

> "Do not touch me,
> for I have not yet ascended to my Father,
> but go to my brothers and say to them
> I ascend to my Father and your Father,
> to my God and your God."

Aroused by the women's strange report of the empty tomb, Peter and John had decided to investigate and were now walking at a fast pace out to the garden. Leaving the city behind them, they started to run, the younger apostle, John, outrunning the other. Stooping down, John observed the funeral cloths. Then he backed away to permit Peter to enter through the open door. A moment later the two apostles stood inside together seeing the place where the Crucified One had been laid to rest. They stared at one another in perplexed incredulity, for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again. And yet deep within John was filled with a sense of incommunicable assurance and peace.

Returning to the Upper Room, the apostles walked through streets where the Jerusalemites had begun to appear, getting ready for their small duties of another ordinary day. The Passover had ended.

In the Upper Room the forenoon was passed in subdued exchange of views concerning the news brought in by Mary, the other women, and Peter and John. Mary Magdalene insisted that she had seen Him, heard His voice again and received His message. He had called the disciples His brothers. He had sent a special greeting to Peter and had promised to meet them in Galilee.

Fear mingled with anxious joy made all of the men feel utterly uncertain about what this strange dawn had meant.

As two of His disciples announced that they must return to Emmaus, the doorkeeper was asked to follow the travelers down into the street and to bolt the doors securely. No one could know what the murderous men, who had crucified their Lord, now might be planning to do to those whom He had chosen to be His apostles. Ten of the apostles were there. Only Thomas was still missing. No one had seen him since Gethsemane.

As the two disciples, who were returning to Emmaus, left the ugly Passover city behind, they kept talking with one another about the perplexing news which the morning had added to the tragic events of His doom and ignominous death.

All of a sudden a Stranger joined them, directing a question to them, "What are you discussing with one another on the way with such sadness?"

They came to an abrupt halt and turned to face the Stranger Who must have heard some of their gloomy conversation. Then the one called Cleopas questioned the inquirer:

"Are you the only pilgrim to Jerusalem
who has not heard the things that
have happened there these days?"

"What things?"

Cleopas stared at his Emmaus companion, shook his head

and gave the inquirer a brief summary of their Passover experience:

> "About Jesus of Nazareth, Who was a prophet
> mighty in deed and word
> before God and all the people.
> How the chief priests,
> and our rulers,
> delivered Him to be condemned to death,
> and have crucified Him.
> But we had hoped
> that it was He who should have redeemed Israel.
> But even so today it is the third day
> since all these things came to pass."

As Cleopas noticed how eagerly the Stranger was listening, he continued:

> "Yes, and certain women of our fellowship
> frightened us; they were early at the tomb;
> and when they could not find His body,
> they came and said, that they had seen
> a vision of angels, who said He was alive.
> Some of those who were with us
> went to the tomb and found it to be
> as the women had said,
> but Him they did not see."

As the three wanderers continued on their way, the Stranger took the word and kept it:

> "O fools, and slow of heart,
> to believe all that the prophets have spoken.
> Ought not Christ to have suffered these things,
> and so enter into His glory?"

The next hour the Stranger filled their journey with a truly astounding Scriptural interpretation of the facts that Cleopas had related from the Passover in Jerusalem. Beginning with Moses the Unknown showed His fellow travelers how all the scriptures had predicted exactly what had happened to this Jesus of Nazareth. The Emmaus travelers were made to see how the Divine Plan, step by step, had been fulfilled through the very happenings which had taken place as the Messiah was made perfect as the Redeemer. Everything fitted, every prophecy had been fulfilled. God's Will had been done.

All of a sudden they were walking into Emmaus.

As the Stranger seemed eager to continue to another destination, the two disciples halted, begging Him to stay overnight. Their minds and hearts were overwhelmed by the insights He had revealed concerning the Lord's Messiah.

"Abide with us,
for it is drawing close to evening
and the day is far spent."

A simple evening meal is served at once. The Stranger takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them.

Instantly they see. It is the Lord.
But He vanished out of their sight.
Staring at one another with wide open eyes, they confess:

"Did not our hearts burn within us,
while He talked with us on the road,
and when He opened the scriptures to us?"

Instantly they recalled what they had heard that morning in the Upper Room. The next moment they hastened back to Jerusalem to tell their wonderful, wonderful experience to the apostles and the other disciples.

Knocking at the bolted door, they heard someone descend.

Having identified themselves, the door opened and they were welcomed with a shout of joy:

"The Lord is indeed risen.
He has appeared to Simon!"

"He has appeared to us too!" they exclaimed, as they rushed upstairs to tell the apostles and the disciples of Jesus of their strange journey and of the breaking of the bread.

Downstairs the doors were again bolted shut. There was still the fear of the enemy, His and theirs.

That very day, the first day of the week, at evening the Risen Lord came and stood in their midst and said to them: "Peace be unto you."

Terrified at what they thought was a spirit, the disciples sat in speechless awe as they heard the voice that they all knew:

"Why are you troubled? Why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me have."

To underscore His identity, He showed them His hands and His side. They all saw that He had come by the way of the Cross. Their unbelief vanished, but now they did not believe for joy. His very presence shocked them with gladness. Reading their astonished faces He asked them:

"Have you here any food?"

In the sacred silence that filled the Upper Room someone gave Him a piece of broiled fish and a piece of honeycomb.

He took it and ate it before their eyes.

Having seen the apostles believed, He spoke:

> "Peace be unto you. As my Father has sent me, even so I send you. These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

As the Lord spoke, the apostles inwardly relived the day He had first called to them to be His messengers and they realized—forever—that His gospel was for all the world. Through John's mind ran the memory of the night when the Lord had spoken with Nicodemus about how the Son of Man must be lifted up.

As they were kneeling before Him in glad worship, He raised His hands, breathed upon them and said:

"Receive the Holy Ghost. Whosesoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins you retain, they are retained."

Suddenly He vanished out of their sight.

The week which followed was filled with newness. All things had become new. Gone was their fear and their doubts. The doors remained unbolted. Led by Peter, the apostles and the others changed from a group of frustrated and defeated people into a communion of believers who shared a living Mystery. They would gather at the empty tomb to sing praises

unto God. Each of them would go seeking for some follower of the Lord who had gone into hiding. Day by day their group grew and all were told the facts of the Third Day and how He had been seen by the apostles. The Upper Room became their new Temple, where they told and retold the Story and where the apostles never tired of imparting to all believers the words He had preached, the miracles He had performed, the comfort He had given.

At length even Thomas came out of hiding. The disciples received him with a kind understanding which came from their own experiences of flight, fear and frustration. They had all fled. They had made high promises only to make shattering experiences of how deep was their cowardice, how fragile their self-reliance. And yet the third day had changed them into new men. They were walking in the new world of His resurrection. To the skeptical mind of Thomas this new and abiding gladness of the apostles was annoying and inexplicable. Again and again the apostolic company tried to convince him of the indisputable fact that the Lord had truly visited them, spoken to them and reordained them. Their efforts were in vain. The more they tried to imbed their new faith even in Thomas, the angrier his skepticism became, until he frankly laid down his conditions:

> "You say that you have seen the Lord. As for myself, except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

At that negative confession the others fell silent. They recalled many instances when Thomas had voiced his doubts even in the presence of the Lord who had chosen him to be His apostle. Also, they could not forget that they themselves

had been dominated by an unbelief which had made them insult the women who first brought the news of His Resurrection. Had they not upbraided those excited women for bringing them idle tales?

A week after the Resurrection Day the disciples were again gathered in the Upper Room and Thomas with them. Reclining around the supper table they were placed as they had been the night the Lord was betrayed. They all felt that it had become a sacramental table ever since the moment He had blessed the bread and the cup and given them to eat and to drink. Also, in His memory, they had continued to leave the place of the Lord empty at the meals. Two places away Judas' place was also empty.

> "Then Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace be unto you.' Turning to Thomas He said, 'Reach hither your finger and behold my hands; and reach hither your hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.' "

There was a moment of worshipful silence as Thomas stared into the face of the Risen Lord. Then the answer came with a loud and glad voice:

"My Lord and my God."

Jesus said to him:

"Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed: Blessed are they that have not seen and yet believe."

In a few days the apostles and the other disciples were seen again in Galilee, along the shores where He had first called them to be fishers of men. They kept to themselves as if they were bound together by a deep secret.

The citizens of Capernaum and Bethsaida had heard from

the synagogue leaders of the untimely end of the Galilean rebel, Jesus of Nazareth. Without lament the religious leaders had told of His crucifixion at the hands of Pontius Pilate. They withheld from their people, however, the part which the chief priests had played in the condemnation of the Nazarene. This the synagogue leaders had decided was the best way to handle the awkward case, since they agreed with their leader Caiaphas that it was better that one man be executed rather than to have the whole nation be threatened with extermination at the hands of the Romans.

When the citizens had gone to His disciples to get their version of the tragic end of the kind Galilean, they had found them uncommunicative. His disciples had no comments to make. In fact, to the inquirers it seemed as if His friends had not even been in on the events which had led to the crucifixion of their Master during the Jerusalem Passover.

For a few days Main Street talked and wondered about the fate of the hapless Galilean prophet. Some would recall the miracles which He had performed in their midst, but then the worldly-wize zealots would remind them of how utterly foolish the Galilean had been. If He had only organized the masses into a mighty army, He might have redeemed Israel. Alas, He had not known how to use the extraordinary powers He possessed. It was truly a pity that such a tragic thing should have happened to their fellow Galilean at the bloody hands of Pontius Pilate. Even so He, had died alone; Simon, John, James and the others were all back home again, safe and sound. In fact, His returned followers, now gathered around Simon, appeared content to be back. Even though they did not talk about their Master, their faces seemed to shine with an inner radiance.

What the Galileans did not know was that over the next few weeks the Lord was being seen by His disciples to whom He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. One dawn He met Peter, John and the others after a fruitless night of fishing. He was standing waiting for them on the shore as the day broke over the Galilean spring.

Another time He appeared to more than five hundred disciples, who had gathered with the apostles for a secret meeting in the Galilean hills. In the peace and glory of His presence they heard Him speak of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

After that the Lord one day ordered His apostles to meet Him in a mountain.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying:

"All power is given unto me
in heaven and on earth.
Go you therefore and teach all nations,
baptizing them in the name
of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
Teaching them to observe
all things whatsoever I have commanded you:
and, lo, I am with you alway,
even unto the end of the world."

Ever since, the Risen Lord has walked the Main Streets and the lonely lanes of mankind. World history has recorded His steps down through twenty centuries, and His believers have experienced, millions of times over, the truth of His promise: "Where two or three of you gather together in my name, I will be with you."

Vainglorious and unbelieving men have tried to drive Him out of history with the daggers of their intellect or with the swords of their brutal hate. Still He rules and reigns: "Faith has still its Olivet and love its Galilee."

Wherever He is, there Easter is—each day, and of His Kingdom in the hearts of men there shall be no end.

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